



Into the Midst

Senior Project

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By

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Abstract

This creative novella titled *In the Midst* reveals the journey of Penelope Bronze as she is temporarily in a mental hospital. The hospital is very intimidating with a variety of patients with experiences that are all different on the scale. The longer Penelope stays there, the more she sees, and it makes her wonder if there is not more than there meets the eye at this hospital. With more people staying instead of leaving and there being so little staff, Penelope has to wonder how many people are really here and why are some of them seemingly okay with what they see, while she is ready to run.

Character List

1. Robert Vera:

He is a supervisor at the mental hospital. He helps keep track of patients and their cases. He has nicknames such as Bob and Rob given to him through other characters.

2. Penelope Bronze:

The protagonist of the story. She is often referred to as Penny. She is suspicious of her experiences there.

3. Alistair Harrison:

A computer programmer that works with and is close with Robert. He is called Larry in the story.

4. Jack N. Locklear:

A friend of Robert. He helps Robert with what he can there, while playing pranks on others while trying not to go too far.

5. Dr. Johnson:

Penny's psychologist, among others. He is getting burnt out with the incoming patients. And with so few staff is starting to fray at the edges.

6. Dr. Charlene Mores:

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The main if not the only psychiatrist at the hospital. Is constantly busy and is not often seen but ensures that everyone gets what they need to. Although some may think she is overly enthusiastic about it.

7. Dr. Davis:

A minor psychologist that works there less than he used to due to age. He is over seventy years old.

8. Guards

9. Nurses

10. Sofia Vera:

Appears later in the story. She is Robert's daughter.

11. Marilyn Vera:

Robert's wife. He met her when he was stationed elsewhere. She is often worried for Robert and wishes he worked somewhere else.

12. Marta Alvarez:

Penny's friend that often appears out of nowhere. She moves in not long after Penny does.

13. Edgar Alexeev:

Edgar talks to Robert and deals with him as he must. He dislikes dealing with Larry even more.

He is often rude on accident and is a workaholic.

14. George:

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A patient that often gets referred to and is not seen. He lives near Penny's room and is often in pain due to his arthritis. He is seventy-five years old.

There's a place between two stands of trees where the grass grows uphill
and the old revolutionary road breaks off into shadows
near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted
who disappeared into those shadows.

I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of dread, but don't be fooled
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere else but here,
our country moving closer to its own truth and dread,
its own ways of making people disappear.

I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh of the woods
meeting the unmarked strip of light—
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:

I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear.

And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you
anything? Because you still listen, because in times like these
to have you listen at all, it's necessary
to talk about trees.- Adrienne Rich *What kind of times are these?*

I sit on a bed that is assigned to me in the middle of a hallway. They say it is temporary
and that I should be in a room soon. I have been waiting for a while. It is overcrowded. I was
sent here yesterday (it is currently 3 am), and all I can feel is the rocks in my stomach. The last
thing I remember is this: my friend and I were having a debate about aliens and, somehow, we
landed on politics. It just went that way, like always. The conversation goes from topic to topic.

We were discussing just how safe the neighborhood is. I mean with all this technology what can't the government see?

I attempt to get up and all I could feel is lethargy. My limbs are heavy. I can only glance around lazily. I feel as if I have waited forever. It's not exactly uncomfortable and the reason for my being here is ludicrous. My family and doctor claim I have something wrong with me and that what I said isn't normal for people, but that is not true! Many people say things like I do! Nothing new and nothing different. I was sent here by a family member whose concern is misplaced. They should know more than anyone that these types of places make me uneasy. I hear all types of things about these places. Fear sinking in within my unknown surroundings. I begin to shout into the air "Hello! Hello! Is anyone there? Where am I? I want to go home!" I get up looking outwards around the hallway. I know I am in a mental health hospital, but not the exact location or name. My mother drove me here while I was asleep. I can picture her nervously driving down the road.

I can't see much down the hall with various people with different problems. I see more people in the hallway with a variety of uniforms separating personnel from patients. One is bald and overweight. He is wearing scrubs and there is an ID that is outlined in the color of a field of flax. The patients are all surrounding him and talking. Now he is going into another location, multitasking by talking and shuffling the paperwork in his hands. They mainly talk to themselves now with him gone. The whispers are getting louder entering my brain and banging against my eardrum. I can concentrate on nothing. Not even the television. The whispers are everything and I ignore it. Pushing it back I try to concentrate on the TV screen. I see the ancient screen, but I catch nothing. It is all meaningless babble anyway, I guess. My friend likes to joke and call it fake news. I shift my weight slightly and cross my arms. All things I can't see and don't know

about this place becomes a giant weight on my chest. All films and stories that I hear about psychiatric hospitals rush into my mind from years ago. From stories like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Sound and the Fury*, the first I saw the movie version and the second I heard about from my cousin.

The unknown of what will happen to me here weighs heavily. It's like being a bodybuilder without the build. I see a baseball player use a bat on the screen. It is rather odd for bats to appear on the TV screen, don't they only appear at night?

Two men walk towards me from a direction I had not noticed. The first one introduces himself. His name is Dr. Johnson. He calls my name, which surprised me. I never gave him my name. He leads me to his office down the hallway.

"How did you get my name?" He looks at me and answers calmly.

"I assure you; you are where you need to be. You were recommended to us by another party who was concerned for your welfare. As for your name, I can access it through your transfer paperwork sent over by your primary physician. All of this is merely the protocol assigned."

He writes something on his writing pad while seated in his chair.

"How are you feeling?"

I look at him and feel nothing but rising anger. His response answers nothing. Absolutely nothing.

"I have no reason to be here."

Without missing a beat, he gave his explanation. He first explained that the situation that was told to him. Someone stated that I was screaming about a painting and insects. That I claimed that is how they were watching me. Watching all of us. *I didn't do anything that would cause something like this. He is exaggerating. I don't yell. Everyone experiences these thoughts and*

they know it is all true. The doctor adds to it stating that for the time being they may eventually let me go as the condition deeming that my condition improves.

He asks a third person who is in the hall to do something and went back to his seat. I feel a rush come up to my skin, my ears begin to ring. My head feels foggy and weighed down. I hold my head in my hands shaking. I am being sent back out for who knows what after waiting a lifetime.

Dr. Johnson responds tiredly “I am telling you early that I expect to see you again in a week. I will speak to the psychiatrist here to help create the best possible outcome for you. I apologize for the wait.”

He takes more notes on a notepad that I want to read, but he is seated too far away from me for me to see it.

“When you get assigned a room there will be paperwork on your desk that gives details about who we are and the program that has been prepared for you. Every program within this facility is catered per patient. Your well-being is the priority here.” His explanation gives me a start.

I will only put with this as long as I am here. I don’t want to be here any longer than I have to.

“I don’t need anything that this facility has to offer.”

I tell firmly to the psychologist. The psychologist seems to grow even more tired. His eyes say that he has heard this all before. Then I notice that his hair is greasy. He either does not have many breaks from this place, or he just does not take care of himself. His hair is dark brown, but now it is almost black and sticking to his skull. Some parts are so flat, you can see the dry skin on his scalp.

“Regardless of your need to be here. Talk to me, Ms. Bronze. Tell me about yourself.”

He tries his best to smile, but it does not come off very friendly. It appears grim and he had food left in his teeth. If someone looked close enough you could see the plaque. I notice that most of his outfit did not match. Who let him out of the house like that? He is wearing a grey suit, however, his tie had multiple polka dots and his socks and shoes do not match each other.

“Ms. Bronze? Are you alright? Would you rather us talk another time?”

“No. I am fine.”

He straightens up in his chair, the chair and his shoes squeak as they did so and asks what the last thing I remember is. I thought back and all I could think of things that I talked about with my friend and my job along with the incident he described. Nothing seemed particularly odd to me.

“I remember going to work and talking with my friend and the incident you described earlier and now I am here.”

I think my mother brought me here. She deemed it necessary to send me here. I know she did it because she cares, but she is looking at it all wrong. He looks even more curious.

“Anything else?” he asked. I respond in the negative.

Dr. Johnson is about to ask another question before the bald guy with the flax ID interrupts.

Long, too long America,
Traveling roads all even and peaceful you learn'd from joys and prosperity only,
But now, ah now, to learn from crises of anguish, advancing, grappling with direst fate and
recoiling not,
And now to conceive and show to the world what your children en-masse really are,
(For who except myself has yet conceiv'd what your children en-masse really are?)
-Walt Whitman's "Long, too long America" in his *Leaves of Grass*

“It is time for her psychiatrist appointment.”

His voice is deeper than Dr. Johnson's and you cannot see much of him. He towers over many things in Dr. Johnson's office, but he looks somewhat overweight. I cannot tell if it is the clothes that he is wearing or if he is overweight. He is wearing a baggy polo shirt with a logo on it that I cannot identify and wore slacks that nurses would normally wear. His hair is close cut. If I did not know any better, I would think he is bald or involved in a club or organization of some sort.

X

Robert

I am checking the list of new residents. I would like to greet them so that I don't appear suddenly, but I can't do that. At least not right now. I see the person that is next to the list...Penelope Bronze. She has a pre-diagnosis of schizophrenia. I recognize from some time ago. She had some issues, but it wasn't severe at the time.

But then again things change with time. The things that I noticed here vary in quality depending on the psychologist and the diagnosis. Availability always matters. It is my job to ensure that the patients here get quality care. Even if some of the other staff think I am some bodyguard, I won't be their bodyguard. I notice that it is time to guide Ms. Bronze to her appointment and out of the hallway. I reach out for the door.

X

He holds out the door in the hallway and then the guards walk in and escort me from the room and down the hall. The hallway has little decoration on it. The walls themselves are a pale blue. The floors seem to be vinyl wooden flooring. The building is like a maze. I wish for a jacket because they had the air conditioner on and it is winter.

"Thank you, Robert." The psychiatrist said.

Her hair looks like it may have been blonde at one point. She is short and somewhat heavy set. Her hair is in a simple ponytail and she wore a sweater with Winnie the Pooh with khakis and sandals. This place must not have strict dress standards.

“My name is Doctor Charlene Mores; I will be your psychiatrist.”

She goes towards her tall chair that looks centuries old and sat in it. She motions towards other old seats meant for guests. The room lacks paint in some areas of the wall. There are random photos in the room of memories and locations that she visited. I sit there nervously waiting for her to start but she seems focused on her computer, setting up a program or something.

The one she calls Robert took the earbuds from his ears and leaves. I decide to start, “What does he do?” I ask Dr. Mores as she is taking out her tablet from her purse which is next to her metallic desk. She looks at me and states simply “He won’t go out with anybody. I tried.”

This makes me cringe. That is not my question. “No, no. What I meant is he like a nurse?”

She looks at me and laughs a little bit. “Oh, no. He is not a nurse. Robert helps manage people here. A supervisor if you will.”

She shows little remorse over her previous statement. I hope Robert does not deal with this much.

“He is so young. At least compared to me. He only started working here some months ago and this place has gotten better.” she responds without any actual input.

I feel gross and my pity for Robert grows slightly.

“Well, that is enough about Robert. What medications are you taking Ms. Penelope?” she asks.

“I am not taking any medications as I have no need for them.” She does not say anything but typed on her tablet. Unlike Johnson who has a notebook.

She is swiping across her screen with a serious look on her face and continues, “Have you experienced anything odd within the past two months? Any memory loss, confusion, intrusive thoughts, thoughts of suicide, fatigue or paranoia?” That is a lot of questions at once.

“Uhm, no, I have not experienced anything like that except for the fatigue. Which given today is nothing unusual.”

She types it on her tablet rather slowly. It looks new so maybe she is getting used to the formatting.

“That must be due to the medicine given before your arrival. Which is Risperidone and three others. That mixture is not the best. I will shift the medication and make changes. I will send the change to Dr. Johnson to tell you as I learn more about your condition. How are you feeling today other than the fatigue? Do you have any questions or would like to discuss anything Ms. Penelope?” she asks me rather intently.

I have multiple questions. I hope to tackle most of them in a bit, as I want to leave. My feet keep shifting and I glance everywhere but at her face. “I have been told about a pamphlet that details about the hospital, however, I don’t know anything about it. Can you tell me about it?”

“We are at Mary’s Recovery in Annapolis, Maryland. Technically, on the outskirts of Annapolis. We work with various situations here in this establishment. All of which are meant to help the patient for the better.”

Annapolis, Maryland. That is a few cities away from where I live. I currently live in Baltimore. I just moved there a few months ago due to a new job offer.

I am immediately overwhelmed with this information but asking her or even telling her will do nothing. I don't want to embarrass myself anymore than I probably do unintentionally. I should probably have this information.

"That is all I have for right now." I tell her lightly. She nods her head and begins putting her things away.

"We will meet next week, Ms. Penelope. I will send Robert the schedule for him to know and inform you what we have created for your wellbeing here at Mary's Recovery." I walk out with a nurse guiding me back, leaving me with that information.

The nurse's heels clicking behind her, the door is promptly shut. I could see a garden outside, all I had to do is go down the hallway and look through the window glass of the door. It is somewhat hard to see out of, but you could still see. This view is somewhat close to my room. With everyone coming in and out to ask me questions and meet with me I never really got the chance to examine things in the room all that closely.

Being sent to my room, I notice something what I thought is unusual. There is more than one bed in the room and has been arranged in a way that an overprotective mother might set up a house for incoming infant. "What's with the set up?" I ask the nurse. The nurse, not hearing me, closed the door and goes down the hall completing whatever tasks she has next. I notice many chips and attempted paint jobs on the wall. The paint is chipped off more than likely by furniture, age, and people who got bored, I guess. I sit on the bed and flip through the papers left behind on the bedside table.

The papers themselves have various types of information on what this place offers in more a more detailed overview. From group therapy all the way to various models of one on one with the doctor. The pamphlets are in multiple colors and they seem pleasant for someone who

need these. Although some are a little old fashioned. They have yet to update everything compared to other places. I can vaguely remember one of my friends who had to go to a mental facility for a short while and seemed to have a good experience. I hope that my experience is the same. Even as I see myself normal, maybe I can improve in other places.

Thinking back the only problems that I have encountered in terms of my mental health in my life are depression and anxiety symptoms, but that only occurred during a stressful time in my life when I worked at my old job. The symptoms went away after that and I have not really experienced it since. I pick up the pamphlets and toss them on the opposite bed to mine. Whoever uses that bed in the future may use them. I go to my own bed and took a seat. The bed doesn't have a frame. It is a basic bed with a shoddy mattress and a scratchy blanket that has various patches. The blanket smells like either it is not cleaned well or is done cheaply. The blanket overall is making my body itch as I cover my legs with it.

As soon as I could ignore the blanket and could feel sleep taking over, I heard the metallic door creak open.

“This is the greatest moment of your life,
 said the voice both familiar and distant, like a childhood
 friend become spokesperson for a cleaning product—
 which caused the many hats to turn in many directions
 and one robed arm to extend.
 And what after all had been passing?
 The sounds birds made often seemed more cogent
 than the swirl of argument, a cyclone in a sandbox.
 So much management we ought to have degrees
 was a type of joke made at outmoded parties.”

An excerpt of William Stobb's "A moment for Authentic Shine"

The person who came in with an aide. She is thin and frail. She has very little with her. She is wearing a tank top and jeans that seemed to hang onto her. Her shoes are without laces. I feel bad for her as she does not have a jacket. At least, they have not turned off the air conditioner in the short time I have been here. Her drawers are opened by the aide and they place her uniforms there. They glance at the bed and see the packets I threw on the neighboring bed earlier. Annoyed, the aide throws them on my dresser. The aide then speaks to a nurse outside who hands them something that is printed out for my new roommate.

They take her hat before they left. Her shoulder length hair went free. Various dark brown strands stood in various directions. If I had not known she wore a hat, I would think she had been near a static machine. She skims the stuff they left her with, and she looks towards me.

“Hello. I am Marta.”

I introduce myself and ask why she is placed in the facility. Instead of responding, she states nothing and returns to her bed, organizing her papers into rows leaving me where I sat. Well, I guess that is that. My roommate does not really want to talk yet, I guess. Sitting back in my bed, I curl and try to chase the sleep I almost had. Not long after I fell asleep, I hear a knock on the door. Marta is shaking me back and forth and pointing to the man who is standing in the hallway with a clipboard. He is preparing to open the door. She tells me in a whisper that it is fine that he is just one of the nurses. They often come and go as they please whether they are prepped to help anyone here or not.

“Have you been in a facility like this before?” I ask her, wondering if she knew what to generally expect in a place like this. Again, she ignored me.

This is going to be an awkward time. I am about to ask what her problem is, but before I could Robert entered the room. Robert enters the room and announces himself. He keeps his

distance and Marta just ignores him like he never entered. He proceeds to list my schedule that is made by Dr. Mores, I presume it was her anyway. He then places the schedule on my desk and leaves. Even though I heard his whole list, I glance at the typed paper to help the day routine set in.

Mary's Recovery Institute
in Annapolis, Maryland

Schedule for: Penelope Gwyneth Bronze

Preferred Name: Penny

Assigned Medical Employee: James Johnson

Assigned Psychiatrist: Dr. Charlene Mores

Schedule A Day

8:00 am: Wake up and bathroom break 1

9:30 am: Breakfast in Cafeteria

10:30 am: Room 217 Group therapy with Johnson

12:00 pm: Lunch in Cafeteria

12:45: Bathroom Break 2

1:00 pm: Room 114 Art with Chrissy

2:00 pm: Bathroom Break 3

2:15 pm: One on One Therapy with Johnson

3:15 pm: Shift 3A: Cafeteria

5:30 pm: Dinner in Cafeteria

6:00 pm: Bathroom break 4

7:00 pm: Health Education

9:00 pm: Lights Out

Schedule B Day

8:00 am: Wake up and bathroom break 1

9:30 am: Breakfast in Cafeteria

10:30 am: Check in with Dr. Mores

11:00 am: Bathroom Break 2

12:00 pm: Shift 5B: Cafeteria

2:15 pm: Lunch in Cafeteria

3:00 pm: Bathroom Break 3

4:00 pm: Behavior Therapy with Dr. Davis

5:30 pm: Dinner in Cafeteria

6:30 pm: Bathroom Break 4

7:00 pm: Return to Rooms

9:00 pm: Lights out

This schedule is not in the greatest detail. How do the breaks work? Do I just relax in a certain area? Or are these just blocks of time with breaks in-between and I am walking to a new location? I look around for Robert through the window on the door which looks out into the hallway, but he is long gone. Sighing, my shoulders slump and I collapse on my bed. Never a dull moment it seemed. I am always doing something or going somewhere. Just like my job back home. Memories of my job come in waves. None of them particularly exciting. Take paperwork and fill it out or pass it to be filed. Organize the work and take it to the respective worker. Pass none of the information to anyone as it is always sensitive information. There would always be different stamps for different things, and nothing could be read really. A lot of things were marked out by the people who were in the process before me. I just filed things away and sent things accordingly. I did not interact with my coworkers.

My coworkers were different people from everywhere and nowhere. Little information is shared in the space and they were all tightlipped. I never found out much about them. Their faces go through my head like I am looking at files again. I linger on my overly friendly boss. A thick head of curly hair who is too tall and seemed to never eat. He is always making friends or at the very least tried to befriend them. His attempts at friendship rubbed me the wrong way and he just let me be. His moods shifted from dead serious to gregarious. A lot of the times I isn't sure what to expect, but somehow it worked out okay every time. Everyone followed him and took him seriously. He had only one person above him and no one knew what he looked like. Much less his name. I only barely remember seeing the outline of his office because it is so different from the rest of the building in color. The majority of the offices and the building is a mixture of white

and gold while his is simply greys and blacks that highlighted each other with this odd lamp that lit up the room.

The memories of the office begin to take over and I can see the people there. Their faces all seem to stare at me in surprise. When I swear, I did not do it! It is an accident! I should not have been there, yet they asked me to be! I could see their judgmental faces and my gut begins to fall again. I can feel the perspiration on my neck and my breath left me.

“What are you thinking about?” Her question brings me out of my reverie.

Heart beating fast, I jump out of bed feeling like I ran a marathon. I could not tell if I was dreaming about my workplace. If I was, I really need a break.

“Are you going to respond if I tell you?”

She looks at me with her eyes narrowed.

“I can’t hear you. I am deaf.” she responds with arms crossed.

I feel my heart sink to my stomach. My face feels hot and I can feel my stomach doing somersaults and I cannot look her in the eye. I want to disappear from her. Sink into the floor and disappear. It is the most desired outcome of all. The outcome would not happen if I hadn’t pushed it.

She keeps on looking at me, which makes me feel smaller and smaller and I want to stick and blend into the wall. The moments tick on and I begin to feel like something is crawling on my arm and when I swiped at my arms there is nothing.

“Alright. Whatever.” She replies shortly.

I slump against the wall and I go to the farthest part of the room. If I knew that she is deaf I would have tried another means of communication.

Looking at the door I wondered if I would be allowed to step out. That schedule is so restrictive. I could not believe how many places I had to go to. I look around to see if there are any guards and grab the doorknob and find it unlocked.

I walk out into the hallway and eventually by the time I get to the area near the gardens I am stopped by one of the guards. They turn me around and send me back to my room and remind me that my next block will start soon. My next block will be at 2:15pm and I will be with Dr. Johnson. I don't want to be there either. It may be better than here, but I want to go outside or go home. Just not here. With little choice left I go back into my room. Sitting on my bed and I turn away from Marta. I curl into a ball under the itchy blankets that seems aged and plaid. I cry as silently as I can. The next few days were long and completely horrid. I wanted to do anything, but what was on my schedule.

I fall asleep and soon feel a guard shaking me awake. Groaning I get up and the guard looks at me with wide eyes.

“What?” I ask.

The guard turns me into the hallway and lets me look into a window. I look bad. I have puffy eyes and look like I fought in my sleep. I felt that way too. Sighing I just tried to part my hair and kept on with the schedule. The guard tries to get me to see a nurse too while I am on the way to see Dr. Johnson, but that isn't happening. I remember their judgmental faces and how much they wanted easier patients when I was awoken for a physical. They must not only take your picture for registration, but to also makes sure you don't have other problems. If you refused to take a photo for registration, they will hold your face for you. I heard them whispering about that during their last time with Marta as they were taking her to the doctor, apparently, they were having a hard time as they could not tell her anything as they did not learn sign

language. Most people in this facility don't anyway. A few do, I assume maybe a couple doctors, nurses, and maybe Robert, but who knows really. I would assume there is at least three as she is here.

Finally getting to his office, which is located in a building adjacent to the one where us patients stay, takes a few minutes as there is always a line of patients waiting to see someone. Not just Dr. Johnson. I am jealous of those who have other psychologists like Dr. Davis. He is a nice old man who offers a snack he got us from the vending machine and to talk about whatever you are comfortable with. He asks that you share a little about yourself and talks in a way that makes it feel like the self is returning back home. Unlike Johnson where it constantly runs away. I wish he is my psychologist, but he is booked and can't take any more patients. At least that is what Dr. Mores tells me.

“Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.” -Confucius

Walking to Dr. Johnson's office is always odd. There is informational stuff everywhere with few portraits to speak of other than nature ones. Plus, his office is decorated different than the rest. There are cartoon characters throughout the office. He has frames of anything from Looney Tunes to Roger Rabbit. His outfit is always ugly, and his attitude makes me more often than not on edge.

I wait for him to walk into his office as he always prints something before the session. It takes him a couple minutes and then he grabs his notepad from his desk drawer and begins asking me the same questions that he has before. These questions are:

“Are you having negative thoughts?”

“Are you seeing anything such as hallucinations?”

“Do you hear anything no one else can?”

“Are you paranoid about anything?”

I always answer the same way. No to every single one of them. If I had any of these, why would I tell him? And his voice is always monotone. He always takes note of the same things that I say. Nothing changes in questions nor their response. Someone could sketch our dialogue as if it were their childhood home. Except there is no nostalgic feeling to speak of.

Eventually I go to the cafeteria, where I prepare desserts. The food I make is better than others. The desserts that most of them eat tastes like little Debbie's (which none of us are really allowed to have) and mine tastes like grandma's cooking. At least that is what I like to think. No one here has complained any at least. Most of them tell me it is good. I sit there and sweat. I wait until everyone has finished eating, then I can eat. Although some patients from different wards may postpone that a bit. I think nervously remembering when the orderlies had to run in and help someone who is becoming overwhelmed by everything. Not that I can blame him. This place is not for everyone. It may suit a few, but those like George. Not so much. He has a various amount of issues that people aren't sure how to deal with. So, he has been here the longest. I am not sure if he is in the residential facility or if he is constantly extended. I tend to believe the former.

Those who work in the cafeteria get leftovers and we eat them at our pace. It is a luxury that other patients do not get to have. They want to get rid of as much food as they can. If they don't get rid of it, then in the eyes of the higher ups it is wasted money and they have to throw it away rather than save it. The schedule is tighter for other patients, while ours get a little more leniency due to requirements in the kitchen. The preferences anger many of the people here. They wish to live as they had, without forced choices and freedom, but in turn are treated like the

dolls of a child on the wall. Dolls collecting dust and are broken by life's use. The use of forever. A machine of hand me downs and the total lack of interest of someone who had grown out of the doll entirely. Some may care for the doll afterward, but most of them? They fear ones like George who they can't predict or understand. George is unable to do patterns. The way things affect him, it can't be done. It can be unsettling but its George. After we are done, we must clean up along with other members that are here. Some of us wash dishes, others wipe down the tables and take out the trash. I sweep and mop the floor.

We celebrate their days,
Eat hotdogs, love baseball,
But they say we were born to weed,
Change diapers, carry crates in the grey of dawn
While they sleep. Awake, they look at us without seeing.
We see ourselves clearly, know ourselves
Precisely, without parades and picnics.
To survive, we must.
I am one of the invisible living among the notable.
Day after day I hear doors shut,
Stumble over slurs, and bump into the man
*Who nods yes, yes, but isn't listening-Renato Rosaldo in her work *Invisibility**

My schedule continues and rotates the same as any other day. While my appointments with Dr. Mores are monotonous and bland. I begin to hate my appointments with Johnson more

and more. He always has weird commentary and gives odd vibes. Some of the people who had appointments before me look like they had the life sucked out of them. With each appointment they grow more and more wary and lifeless. I asked them what is wrong, and they made no commentary. All they said is that Johnson said it is part of the process and that it will pass. That soon it all will fade. Whether they actually believe it or not is another question. I feel wary after my appointments with Johnson for a different reason and if it passes, I need a different type of help.

The way he speaks, and acts creates the enigma in which I feel like a trapped bird in a cage only there for a scientist to take notes. The bird in the cage that is only seen by the interested party and those who want the advantage of noting it all. That process in which one could easily see the noted and the reasons behind it. Can the process that they proclaim be truly so cruel? After all, Johnson is just so odd and treats everyone as their own species. Not only that he doesn't seem to understand personal space much. Every appointment I have he moves a seat closer to me than I want him to be. When I pointed this out to him, he moved some but would only keep up the distance for a couple of days and act like I had never made a request. He never asks about my day or anything. It is just the same constant questions on repeat. To which he would gain the same answers. Not like any change has occurred within the past few days. This place looks the same and makes you feel the same. Like you are the man who died in Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*.

After all that is over with, I walk into the hallway and find Robert talking to one of the patients who stay here. He is as tall as Robert except the man who is speaking to him is slimmer and leaner. He dressed differently than the rest in my building. His outfit is freer, and he can wear clothes like those outside. It makes me angry no matter that I see him infrequently here. He

is one of those with more leniency, yet I barely see him anywhere. I wonder what makes him gain more privilege than others. How did he manage to be able to get these things in a place where you were watched in everything, including how you chew food? But then again, I did not create the lines. He is looking to Robert and to a piece of paper glancing back and forth like a constant double take. The man speaks rapidly and although I hear nothing, I can see his hands moving rapidly. I step forward to try to figure out what is going on, but with each step I take they seem farther and farther away. I begin to wonder if they are walking and talking, but the faster I walk the more time I am taking to get to them. I begin to feel sweat soaking the uniform that I must wear. My eyes now see everything in the hallway and yet nothing at all. As I am running, I feel something grab my legs and it stops me in place. I look down and don't see anything but a shadow that seems to grow across my leg feeling like many spiders. I bend down and swipe at my leg trying to get the bugs off. They get bigger and more numerous on my legs and even expand to my arms. I try scratching them off. But to no avail, they just aren't affected by mere swiping. They even expand to crawl on the floor in a large group towards me. Some are spiders, but some are obviously not. They look like roaches and my heartbeat keeps getting louder in my ears. It becomes so loud I am sure that it must be their heart beating. Their heart pound so loud against my ear, it could beat the walls with a physical fist. With the whispers of the unknown fading with the buzz.

Fourteen volcanos rise

in my remembered country

in my mythical country.

Fourteen volcanos of foliage and stone

where strange clouds hold back

the screech of a homeless bird.

Who said that my country was green?

It is more red, more gray, more violent:

Izalco roars, taking more lives.

Eternal Chacmol collects blood,

the gray orphans

the volcano spitting bright lava

and the dead *guerrillero*

and the thousand betrayed faces,

the children who are watching

so they can tell of it.

Not one kingdom was left us.

One by one they fell

through all the Americas.

Steel rang in palaces,

in the streets,

in the forests

and the centaurs sacked the temple.

Gold disappeared and continues

to disappear on yanqui ships,

the golden coffee mixed with blood.

The priest flees screaming

in the middle of the night

he calls his followers
and they open the *guerrillero's* chest
so as to offer the Chac
his smoking heart.

In Izalco no one believes
that Tlaloc is dead
despite television,
refrigerators,
Toyotas.

The cycle is closing,
strange the volcano's silence
since it last drew breath.

Central America trembled,
Managua collapsed.

In Guatemala the earth sank
Hurricane Fifi flattened Honduras.
They say the yanquis turned it away,
that it was moving toward Florida
and they forced it back.

The golden coffee is unloaded
in New York where
they roast it, grind it
can it and give it a price.

31 Limón

Siete de Junio

noche fatal

bailando el tango

la capital.

From the shadowed terraces

San Salvador's volcano rises.

Two-story mansions

protected by walls

four meters high

march up its flanks

each with railings and gardens,

roses from England

and dwarf araucarias,

Uruguayan pines.

Farther up, in the crater

within the crater's walls

live peasant families

who cultivate flowers

their children can sell.

The cycle is closing,

Cuscatlecan flowers

thrive in volcanic ash,

they grow strong, tall, brilliant.

The volcano's children
flow down like lava
with their bouquets of flowers,
like roots they meander
like rivers the cycle is closing.
The owners of two-story houses
protected from thieves by walls
peer from their balconies
and they see the red waves descending
and they drown their fears in whiskey.
They are only children in rags
with flowers from the volcano,
with *Jacintos* and *Pascuas* and *Mulatas*
but the wave is swelling,
today's Chacmol still wants blood,
the cycle is closing,
Tlaloc is not dead.

translated by Carolyn Forché, Flowers from the Volcano by Claribel Alegría

It is never-ending. Attempting to take the bugs off is like ignoring a stubborn stain on my shirt. They just kept coming back, never leaving, never completely subsiding. I became angry at myself over not getting them off. Some spots where the bugs are beginning to peak with red liquid. I am killing some! I keep swiping and soon I start screaming:

“Get them off! Why won't they come off?!”

Everything feels stuck in a moment and within moments I feel people grabbing my hands away from my person. Once they grab my arms, I begin fighting back. Why restrain me? There are a bunch of bugs! They were not helping me by grabbing my arms! They put something I could not see on my wrists and began taking me somewhere else.

I could not believe they are making me stick with the bugs. As they are taking me away, I see Robert watching in the corner. As he gets farther and farther, I can now see. He has a phone in one hand while simultaneously taking notes on a clipboard outlined in a faded gold or bronze. He is helping them stay with the bugs! The guy he is speaking to earlier has disappeared. They must be working together for it! All that is left were the various nurses taking me to my room.

Very soon as they were staying with me, Dr. Mores comes down and is speaking to a third nurse in the room. The words fly past my ears and did not reach my brain. Everything is white noise and white noise is me. All I can focus on is the murmur of the background. All noise seems to swirl around me like waves that never touched. Everything is a dizzying moment where everything is too much. And before I could speak to Dr. Mores about the bugs, I see Marta looking at me, the nurses ignoring her, and I saw black.

I wake up to my head pounding. Where am I? I look around and furrow my brows. My eyes travel around the room and I attempt to stand. I find that I am in leather restraints on my mattress. I feel the blood rush to my head. I feel sweat on my body and I cannot breathe. They must be planning something! Why else would I be stuck like this! I continue to move my limbs in the hope that the restraints would loosen. I have scratches from the leather and my limbs start to burn. Eventually I feel something wet on my leg. Did they do something else to me? In the corner of my eye I see Marta. She is sitting cross-legged on her mattress across from me and

seems out of it. She is looking past me and yet directly at me. Her uniform is a different color from mine.

“Hey Marta, help me!” I yelled toward her.

She looks toward me and shakes her head, laying on her side facing the wall refusing to look at me. From here, Marta almost looks like a faded photograph. She almost faded, but I knew it is just stress. She is here, just not here for me.

I fear the vast dimensions of eternity.

I fear the gap between the platform and the train.

I fear the onset of a murderous campaign.

I fear the palpitations caused by too much tea.

I fear the drawn pistol of a rapparee.

I fear the books will not survive the acid rain.

I fear the ruler and the blackboard and the cane.

I fear the Jabberwock, whatever it might be.

I fear the bad decisions of a referee.

I fear the only recourse is to plead insane.

I fear the implications of a lawyer's fee.

I fear the gremlins that have colonized my brain.

I fear to read the small print of the guarantee.

And what else do I fear? Let me begin again.

-Fear by Ciaran Carson

“Hey! Don’t turn from me!”

I yell, moving my legs more and I feel more scratches digging into my legs.

The door busts open and a nurse with Johnson come in. They walk towards my bed and inserted another needle into my arm. The last thing I hear is:

“You know Penelope, there are patients with more issues than this. You need to calm down, don’t hurt yourself.” Before I can respond I fall back asleep.

Waking up I am in a new room. Like the last one but smaller and with only one bed. I is stuck sitting up in a wheelchair. The room is devoid of color. The walls are off-white, peeling with marks on the wall and completely undecorated. There is nothing to see but me. Like the image of me, this place is forgotten. I get few visitors before now and I am sure no one told my relatives of the present situation. The room is the patient soul bare for all to notice but no one to see.

The door had a window that is bigger than before. The only people I can see out of it are guards and nurses. I need to go to the bathroom badly. I try to move forward in the wheelchair, but it would not move. I call out to the guards and they ignore me. They act like I am part of the furniture. Did they always tie people in chairs? All I feel on my arm are bugs that I am trying to get off. Now on my legs I have various bandages. They vary in size and shape. I smell like a mixture of unwashed and anti-septic. The mummy come to life or at least temporary like the elf on the shelf that my mother had for me when I was a child. Nurses try to converse with me, but they do not know how to. They expect something of me that I can yet perceive. Yet the expectations should be the same as any other. But they changed once the bugs became too much and too nerve wracking. Sure, I hear them on occasion. But this is stronger than ever on my skin. It is no longer ignorable. This time, I am like the one that they put on the shelf watching the world go by. I am told they extended my hours to however long and I signed it. Of course, I

didn't know what I was signing due to the drugs. But that is how it became. Me, my memories and the stench of this room seemingly tied for however they deemed fit.

This room smells of antiseptic and restroom which I suspect that the smell began to stick to me like tape. It was left for too many years of no one giving it care and it shows that they do not care too much about the condition of the place. It is like the feel of many patients here. One person that came here for a short period of time said it is different in other places and that this place is just shit, but I don't know. How can anyone know if this is all we can see?

Looking around the room more, my brain feels like it is going to crawl out of my skull. It hurts to look around a lot. Wondering what they changed the meds to made me ill. What choices do I have? Will they let me out anytime soon and will anyone visit me? Stewing in my thoughts as there is little else, I wait for anything or more like anyone to come in and appear.

The only people who I see come by are guards and the occasional patient with different uniforms, some like mine, most were not. Some are purple, others yellow, many white or gray. Some of the residents here had decorations on them and were playing with chips. Often the people I see in the hallway were the same. They seem to walk in a constant circle. No one guiding them or truly caring. Just part of the background like me. The only difference is they have more liberty now. For patients are at the doctor's and guard's mercy.

No one really checks on me, guides me to my scheduled activities or even glances into the room. I wonder if this is self-entertainment and the schedule is for show before, but now it seems to solidify in my brain. The show they need for the world is now me and I become a new shape for the age where people only stare in and are happy, they are not like me. When I need to go into the bathroom, and I can't even get up to go. When I was able to I could not go alone.

There was always a guard. I feel tears roll down my face with the nape of my neck hurting. Being left to my imagination led to nothing positive inducing. All I can think of is horror novels and the possibility of death here as it feels like forever. I begin to suffer things I never had before. I want to scream and run out and never stay alone in the dark again. I want desperately to see anyone other than the nurses that murmur unintelligible things that are not the best. At least that is what I gather from their faces. I would not even mind seeing the people I once hated and judged. I eventually with tears in my face ruin my chair. The only good thing about this is no one is around to see it right now.

I sit there in my own waste and at this point I am used to it. I am cold and hungry. My brain stops trying to come out my skull. I am on the verge of sleep when I hear the door open. There in the doorway I see Robert. I was never happier to see someone than I am today. He is wearing gold and looked shocked yet so sad. That is the most that I have gotten out of someone here in a long time.

X

Robert

I entered the room and what I see is something that is terrible. This doesn't occur here. At least it didn't used to. While it is common to leave patients for a period of time, this is bad. I will report this and keep notes on this incident. The organization should know so that they can move against it and better this place. This is the worst I have seen here. I would like to grab them and move them for protection, but that is not permitted for I am supposed to be objective. I have to be no matter how ugly.

X

For the father who wakes
and wakes himself, eyes full of himself
and for the one, who when the sun descends
slips into the stormy
smite flat the rotundity o' the world.

Done in with conspiracy and murder
in his sleep (his eye-tooth finally unfixed
and tucked into a cheek for safekeeping)

he dreams of a three-armed garment
unable to wonder or comprehend
how he has come to this blurred ridge and broken—
I try to fix in my mind, his shining eyes
the terrors he shut his lips against
and his early morning utterly lucid accusation:
“I never would have believed,” he said to me
“that you would be among them.”

-King Lear by Lisa Sewell

When he enters the room, he looks older and tired. Wordlessly he undid the straps and states he will escort me to the bathroom to get changed. I never moved faster in my life. I quickly grab the uniform and almost fall over walking to the bathroom. All the blood goes to my head

and I have to grab his arm for balance. He tells me if he makes any other movement and waits for me to reply. I think he is the only one of a few who do this with the patients here. He waits patiently and asks if I am. He asks me if I am any better than previous, his eyes are hidden and yet I feel like they were daggers.

I feel anger towards the question. Obviously, I am not. Did he not see what happened to me? What they allowed to happen? How they looked at me? I shoved him away and walked down the new hallway. Everything in the room seemed older than the place I am in previously. Nurses were seen more often than the psychologists and psychiatrists in this part of the facility.

I notice Robert walking a comfortable distance behind me. He is watching me but keeping back. He is probably paid to watch me. To get information about me. For what purpose who knows. I put it past no one. Everyone has their eyes everywhere. Even the technology at home had them I know---. I walk a little faster glancing quickly around the hallway for a bathroom. Or just anything empty that would allow even more space between him and I. I get away from him and I focus on the path in front of me. I don't pay attention to where I am going nor do I care that much about it.

Eventually I find a door that is ajar. Seeing that most of the staff seem to be elsewhere I jog towards it and open it. The stairwell is full of cobwebs and has an unfamiliar smell. I rush upwards and I bump into the same person that Robert was speaking to earlier. He is a tall man with a head full of hair and a beard. His hair had springy black coils. I wonder if he had outside duties or if that is just how he is as his skin had a deeper tan than others. Bumping into the individual who often talked to Robert in the hallway, all he said is "Oops! Ha-ha. Sorry." quickly moving out of the way and continuing in an unknown direction. With little direction left, I decide to follow him.

He went up the stairs quickly. He even skipped some the steps taking two at a time! It is hard for me to catch up.

“Hey! I am shorter than you! Wait up!” I yelled toward him.

He just looks behind him curiously and gives mischievous look, continues up the steps while shaking like he is having a laugh. Not even taking a moment to slow down. There are a couple sets of stairs. Soon enough we reach the next floor. My legs feel like they are going to give out.

Walking on the upper floor is entirely different. The floors are cleaner. The walls are nicer and looked like they have been renovated. They even had small additions here and there. The additions included things that I did not know this place offered like a gym and a small devotional location. Some of the patients here have word puzzles, books, and Sudoku. On the floor I resided you had to pester someone to give you one or just dealt with your boredom as no one noticed you. They do not wear uniforms, but their clothing is lacking some things. For instance, one man I see in his cell has a hoodie, but the hoodie does not have strings. Another man is wearing pajamas in the cell over, but any string or button attachments were gone. They have a gym down the hall and a bigger recreation room. My eyebrows leave creases on my face and my lips turn with it at this revelation. Looking around the new section I realize that I got so lost in the difference that I lost him.

Damn. I followed him all the way up here to lose him. This day is just another one lost under the rug. I keep walking forward looking at the various people here. Some have food I have not seen in a long time such as steaks and pasta. I don't even remember what they taste like. It has been a while since I even thought about ice cream or cake. I did not even realize they served it and I am part of the cafeteria staff! The only things they gave us to serve were swiss rolls,

brownies or cupcakes. Sometimes dessert is just fruit cups. Moving forward with the uniform given to me close to my chest, I found a bathroom. There is only one in this hallway (at least that I see). Entering the bathroom, I realize that this bathroom is the men's room, the bathroom itself is cleaner than that on my floor. At least so far. The bathroom is cleaned as often as the staff could keep up with the first floor anyway. There are less people on this floor, but everything is so much more resources and care for them than the others. Not caring anymore as it is beginning to give me a headache, I carefully choose a stall and go into it.

The stalls in the restroom are small. They have nothing but a roll and the toilet itself. There is nothing else. No trash can nor a hygienic case like the women's restroom in the city which has very cheap supplies in it. This causes problems with the others here who needed them. And of course, there is always somebody in the bathroom with you making sure you didn't do anything of interest. Not like anyone is going to. At the very least not me. Nothing is private. Except for this spot right now. I quickly do my business and get changed. Running back and forth from my stall to the sink to use one section of my old uniform to help clean myself. I am not smelling the greatest anymore. I am sure I smelled like a mixture of barn and antiseptic. You know the scent of the gods.

After running back and forth, I am pleased at my efforts and begin to feel more whole and human than I have in a long time. I hold my old uniform to my chest and try to flush the toilet and.....it does nothing. Um. I mess with the handle again thinking maybe I did not push it down hard enough. Still nothing happened. Sweating, my eyes begin to get wider, I feel like hiding in the floor and not returning. I look around at the toilet and notice that multiple things are missing from the back including a connection between the toilet and the wall. All that is behind the toilet are hanging pipes and wires were taken apart either by maintenance or someone else.

Looking at the pipes and wires I notice something that makes me grossed out. I want to retreat into myself and search for someone's hand sanitizer.

Within those pipes were pieces of paper. Many pieces of paper. They were like tiny flashcards and they were all dry with ink on them. Who is just shoving paper in the toilet pipes? I makeshift my old uniform as a glove and carefully took out the papers. Each of them had something different written on them.

First paper: The food in Building C is leftovers

Second paper: The food in the pantry within Building A is older than it should be and they never care to replace it.

Third paper: Johnson needs to be checked on, his behavior with patients seem odd.

Fourth paper: Check background for some patients the treatment may not be the best

Fifth paper: Multiple patients left to themselves for too long in multiple buildings with the exception of Building D and half of Building A.

Sixth paper: Building D looks the best and is the most functional. Look into the reason why.

Seventh paper: The Centre of the buildings makes the place look great; however, the conditions remain unseen for the most part.

The eighth and last piece of paper within the pipe: Funding of place is odd according to source x, plus be careful. As I am sure you know by now: You are being watched.

The papers bring everything to my attention. That this place is just as odd as I thought.

O the old wall here! How I could pass

Life in a long midsummer day,

My feet confined to a plot of grass,

My eyes from a wall not once away!
 And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
 Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
 Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loath,
 In lappets of tangle they laugh between.
 Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
 Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
 The body,--the house no eye can probe,--
 Divined, as beneath a robe, the limbs?
 And there again! But my heart may guess
 Who tripped behind; and she sang, perhaps:
 So the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
 Died out and away in the leafy wraps.
 Wall upon wall are between us: life
 And song should away from heart to heart!
 I--prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
 At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start--
 Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
 That's spirit: tho' cloistered fast, soar free;
 Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
 Of the rueful neighbours, and--forth to thee!- Robert Browning *A Wall*

Reading that made me drop all the papers at once and as I am about to run, I realize
 something new. I left all the papers on the floor and if someone is being watched then the person

may be me. And if they find out that I know this information...they may kill me like in the movies. Or make my life here even worse somehow with less privileges. I hurriedly collect all the papers together and put them in the order in which they were found and shove them back to the pipes hoping no one is any the wiser.

After putting these papers away, I run so fast out of the bathroom that I forgot to wash my hands and my old ruined uniform is still wrapped around my arms and hands. I sprint down the stairwell almost tripping over steps numerous times but thanks to the old railing on the side wall, I keep my balance. Even if it is rusted. I eventually find the room where I felt forgotten in the wheelchair, but I keep going. Never again will I be stuck in there. I run past faces that I have seen multiple times walking past the room aimlessly, curiously, and some creepily. I keep running. I run towards the Centre and see that there are various buildings at this institute. Each one with a specific letter identifying it. I never realized this before.

The Centre is in sight and the style is like any city hall. I go there with the blood drumming into my ear and opening the door leads to a sound of something cracking. The door slamming against the wall makes many people turn towards me. There are numerous people in corners and in the general room itself, walking around, never seen, or could only guess at their reason for being here. Mary's Recovery is a very big place that had many acres even if I were here for ten years, I would never be able to meet everyone and learn their story. At the head of the desk is Dr. Mores. Why is she acting as receptionist? Doesn't she have appointments? She looks surprised to see me at all. It is as if she forgotten that I am here. *They have not forgotten you were here. They just fear your knowledge.*

I ignore the feeling gnawing at my head and continue forward towards the desk and throw my uniform towards the trash can behind her. Dr. Mores moves as if the uniform had

poison on the material that would float towards her and kill her. I place my hands on the desk and demand to see my paperwork. Dr. Mores' eyes flash and she tells me that she cannot not receive the confidential information. I would have to get special permission and fill out paperwork from someone else within the Institute for myself or a permitted party to see it.

"I have the right to view any documents that include my medical information. I am not sharing the information with a third party. The information is only mine and I would like to see it." I remember things like this from my past job. They don't necessarily have to see, just have someone send it to me.

Her eyes scrutinize me and again she denies me. She replies that she does not know where the paperwork is currently only that my stay is extended again and that would be all. I have been here for a few months now. The dreams of me getting out of here seemed to become much like the useless toilets. Would I become another George? He is always here and has been for some time.

How do they not know where my information is? She has a computer in front of her! I have been here for a couple months now and they already lost some of my medical information! I begin to fume more and more. I stand there unbelieving and in wonder that the government allowed this place to still run. I lean forward and demand to speak to someone of authority. She looks at me over her old spectacles and there is a gleam in them. The longer this debate continued the more she looks like someone else. Her blonde in some shades of light looks brown and at other times it looks like the normal dyed hair that she already had. She picks up her phone and calls someone and gave them a sentence I cannot hear or decipher. She turns to me with a tired face that seems more relaxed and replies: "He will be here momentarily. Please take a seat."

Finding a chair in the mixture of concerned and scared people is not difficult. There are a multitude of worn chairs. Some have holes in them others do not. Some have stains that is blood, vomit or something similar. Some chairs would be completely unrecognizable in their original design if another chair is not near it with a pattern of some sort on it. The difference between them would be too uncanny for them to not be from the same company. Everyone in their chairs are doing separate things. Some are sleeping, others are staring off into space in a way that I wondered how conscious they are, and other people just could not sit still. They are people screaming, pacing, looking at certain things in the room like the weird poker painting on the wall, or just talking towards nothing or just talking about something nonsensical. Others are just huddled in a corner not particularly paying attention to anybody.

As I wait for the person to appear. Many people get called before me. People who came after me and before me got called before the person I asked for even showed. It takes so long that I begin to doubt that Dr. Mores called anyone at all.

Eventually someone shows up. They are not anyone important and not I wanted to talk to. It is only Robert. He gives me a curious look but quickly switched expressions. He seems concerned but covers it by apologizing for the wait as they are understaffed. He leads me to an office where he said someone will be with me shortly. He whispers in a tone only I can hear and asks why I ran. I reply that I wanted out as my time here is not necessary.

I added "I am tired of waiting for the personnel and being here. I want to go home."

It comes off angrier than I mean to, but I am becoming more annoyed than ever. I wait for what feels like a century to get here only to be forced to wait in another spot for who knows how long. Plus the treatment here has not been the best care, it's a mixture of overprotective mother and misunderstandings, most just try to appear like they're getting along with life.

“I apologize, again we are understaffed. Someone will be with you shortly. I hope you get what you are looking for.” he responds with a thoughtful face as he walks out.

With the door shut behind him I glance around the room. His face annoys me. And what’s more what did he mean by that? *I hope you get what you are looking for?* What happens here? Sitting there I begin to notice various newspaper clippings on the wall and paintings of what looked to be rich people. They paid for a portion of the facility it seems. I guess that is why they have better upkeep than others. While the rest is in shambles. The only nice spot is like a zoo, where you get to see the humane. They don’t get to see where the false schedules. The lack of activities that reflects that the way reality is, the things they don’t have supplies for. At least not in my building. The resources that they claim to have, don’t really exist and if they do it’s not enough at all for anyone.

X

Robert

There are few in this part of the building. There are a few administrators. But everyone else is in a different part of the building. It will take a while for any particular person to show up. She would have to have real luck for anyone other than a psychologist to appear. And it will likely be Dr. Johnson who does. He is one of the few who have a free hour around this time. Everyone else has their appointments.

People here are understaffed and underpaid. The training is okay, however they need more specialized ones. Most here are only general, they aren’t sure how to properly handle others. They try with what they have. Dr. Johnson is going to be grouchy as he has not had good rest in the past few days. Very few have recently. The supplies are slow to get here. The events

out of the hospital have made it slow. Hopefully she won't get too insulted about it. I can't do much other than tell her we are understaff. Even if some of what Dr. Johnson is up to is odd.

X

No palms dolled up the tedium, no breathing wind.

No problem was the buzzword then, their way to go.

In truth, my case was black as sin, a thing to hide,

In that they feigned to find me sane, so not to know.

Someone brought in a medium. Anathema! Some clown sewed up my eyes,

he said it wouldn't show. Confusing hands with craze, they howled,

"Let's cut them off." Confusing, too, their spies, my lies without an echo.

Time and again they stitched my mind with warp and woof.

Time pounded in my ruby heart, doing a slow,

Slow dim-out in that lupanar, slow take, slow fade,

Slow yawning like a door. "Hello," I said. "HELLO."

There, flung across the room between inside and out,

There must have shown itself to me. . .an afterglow.

With such a blaze to celebrate where centuries meet

With time itself, how could I hesitate?

Although Still trapped in the millennium I knew I had

Still time to blow some kisses. Look up, there they go!

-No Palms by Dorothea Tanning

The slowness of it all drags on. I feel like if I am here any longer, I will feel the dust settle on my arms. I could become one of the many famous stories of ghosts just watching people in places like this. Eventually, after what seemed like forever, Dr. Johnson comes through the door. Great. I wanted anybody else. He had to be the one on duty today. All the way here though? You would think he would have other places to be. He looks at me and motions to an office. Settling in his chair, I notice that he looks worse for wear. Suddenly he slams his notebook on the table. The new noise from the previous lack of it, makes me jump two feet in the air.

“What is it that you need?” he asks with a look that look more agitated than tired now. It makes me nervous and I can no longer focus on him.

“I want my information.” I tell him directly. I want to know everything that was ever recorded. I want to know why I am still here and have been extended for over four months. This can’t be the case for other places nor for the patients. I want to run. Run faster than any other runner on earth far from here. But I know that I cannot. I know my rights and the others should too. I can feel all the moisture in my mouth gradually disappear.

He just looks me intently. All he replies with is this:

“You know what your information is. Besides the fact. Some days you are convinced that you have something wrong and other days it’s nothing. You are filled with delusions. There are patients with much worse symptoms than that. I ask you to please stop wasting our time with this.”

And with that, he got up and leads me out. Down the hallways that are much cleaner than all the rest within this facility. Filled with photos and sayings that are optimistic. The feeling

never reaching anyone but the researcher, I feel like I have been crumbled in an unwanted trash can that no one cared to read or properly tend to.

As I am guided by guards out of the centre I notice something I have not seen in some time. The greenery. I missed it a lot. The greenery of the garden and all its glory. It fills me with deep sadness, especially since despite all the care put into the lawn in keeping the grass nice, the flowers meant for the season were withered beyond compare.

Gaining back into the building that I used to stay in. I notice that there is now only one bed. I turn to the guard about to ask about Marta, but before I could they shove me in the room and close the door. If I was not used to them doing this I would have fallen on my knees. The amount of force that they use is unnecessary. At least, I tell myself, this is not the worst they could do. From what I hear, they are much ruder to other patients. Those who were admitted some time ago. The patients that are so heavily medicated and ill that they cannot speak for themselves. Most of the time, the doctors don't really talk to them. They talk to them even less than they would talk to patients that they put in my category. They are talked to like they are not even there. They just keep them going through a revolving door of medications and orders that cannot be followed alone. From what I hear through the door as I pass through appointment after appointment, I see them just talking without looking at them. One of the patients that I see taking the brunt of it all is George.

George is an old patient here. Sometimes I think he has been here longer than I have been alive sometimes. He is constantly held here and many of us don't want to become him while pitying and fearing him all together. He has problems with what he remembers and sees. He told me once in his odd moments of clarity when I served him food in the cafeteria that he used to be

different than this. It is not until he came here that his symptoms got worse. The doctors here just tell him he is lying and make his dosage higher. After his appointments I notice many patients talking to him in a soothing way. That one day he won't have to put up with it anymore. That someone will come here and understand him. But George one day just snapped. He broke down in the hallway near his psychologist's office and yelled that they would never understand him. Never. His condition became Stonehenge to them. They wonder at it and call it a marvel, but never found the root. They were too busy looking to help the obvious.

George can be heard from my room, but not seen. Often, I can just hear him in pain. The older he got the worse his arthritis got. They just attributed it to phantom pains. So, every night, he just seems to be overflowing with noise about his pain. No cure. No help. I think he just deals with it; he has no other choice. When his arthritis gets bad I can hear the nurses and guards yell at him to keep quiet as it is lights out and that it is not that bad. He puts up with what he can. As what else can he do in a place where the person can only hope to get picked by carefully placed crafted gold.

There is gold only on certain nurses and guards. They are a unit that comes by every now and then. They are more helpful than any other. They are kind to those like George. He likes it when they come by. They let him talk to them and tell them about himself. If the doctors would let him, he would talk about everything he liked and had received that week, if he got anything. Whether it is a letter from a granddaughter or a nice word from one of us he would share it. Other patients would smile and laugh with the unit. They cracked jokes and often, they had treats for us. Treats that we often did not get to receive like a tootsie roll pop or gum. It is like the circus came by for us.

But their visits are few and far in between. We would look forward to their visits, but they only come in when the doctors claim there is enough to send for them.

I begin to look closely at the other guards and nurses to see if any of them had gotten gold. Most of them didn't. They often have colors such as grey or black, or just a favorite character that they wore. Only one person that works there frequently has a color even close. Robert. He has bronze on his ID card other times it is a gold color. It changes on occasion and other times I can't tell what is there at all. It makes me wonder if the colors have a meaning of rank or placement. Or if it is just my imagination of thinking too much. After all, who heard of such things in a place like this. But gold is the best to see. Even for a short day. Those who wore gold brought a happy face.

Curiosity building as my routine starts again. I repeatedly go to the same events. But with the knowledge I gained from the notes. I want to know more. I couldn't just read them and ignore them. I want to know the truth behind them. For me to know; I have to sneak out of this building. I must go back to that bathroom and see. See if there is anything new to be seen. I follow to my next destination. It is almost 5:30pm. That means that soon we are going to have dinner. During dinner I will bribe one of the others with one of the more well-liked foods for some gloves. Tonight, we will have borscht soup with a grilled cheese sandwiches for dinner and chocolate chip pancakes for dessert. Everyone loves the pancakes here, though we could live without borscht. Especially the teenagers here. A lot of them don't care for the sour flavor with the seasoning that the staff chooses for it.

Following the line for the food, I felt like time is just a snail on a hill. Moving ever so dutifully and slow. The line is slow for a variety of reasons. The first being that they surprised us with two choices for dinner and the second is that many of the people here are medicated. They

had to move slow or they will fall. Some were unable to get to their food at all and a nurse had to retrieve it for them and serve it. I carefully chose the second option: vegetable soup with bread and fruit. I wanted the fruit. Especially the one with the most grapes. Oftentimes the nicer fruits went to those in better spots or positions. Lucky day for me so far. If we eat too fast they would be convinced we were trying to die, build a weird habit or binge in the bathroom later. The truth for the way we eat varied and is different all around. Some of us just eat fast out of habit and others may have had genuine issues. I eat like anyone else, but that did not stop the nurses and guards from staring at me intensely as I eat. I wonder if they have fun watching us eat.

“En el acuario del Gran Zoo,
nada el Caribe.

Este animal
marítimo y enigmático
tiene una blanca cresta de cristal,
el lomo azul, la cola verde,
vientre de compacto coral,
grises aletas de ciclón.

En el acuario, esta inscripción:

“Cuidado: muerde”.-Nicolás Guillén in his poem *El Caribe* in *El Gran Zoo*

Entering back to the back of the cafeteria I begin putting things to their respective places. Everything had to be orderly and in place even if the people were not. We could be stumbling, crying or begging, but in the end, it is the appearance that is important here. *Smile! People will worry too much if you're not. They will see the place where you fell*

and the place in your childhood where it all started to hurt while holding your favorite toy.

Taking a step away I walk to my room putting a couple of sweets in my clothes and hope I don't get checked today. I am hoping to use the sweets for a trade. They did checks on patients sometimes and I just hope it won't be me. I plan to go back to where I found the notes to see if I find anything new. The sweets will keep the awake patients quiet and I might be able to acquire other information about this place. The information that I am looking for is not only mine, but why this place is different and the truth about it in comparison to other places. I go into my room and wait for lights out at nine. The most consistent organization known to man is their schedule and the need to grasp all by the reins, or at the very least that is how it all looks to us. The reality is ever translucent to me. Coming and going and I can hear the bugs crawling on the walls. The whispers of the shadow men in the hallway. I am told they are not there; I believe it as no one else has taken notice. But sometimes it is looming more than any nurse or self. It's annoying, intrusive, and ever creepy. The bugs are now a part of me as much as my own skin I hate it, but I live with it. Just as everyone else.

I am back in my room and I no longer see the other bed. But Marta passes by the room in the hallway. I want to talk to her, but I don't know sign language. It's nine at night and we are not supposed to go out of our rooms, otherwise an alarm will go off. No one knows if it works though. The threat of an alarm is good enough to deter people leaving their room. I remember the door has a mixture of devices that ensure that no one can easily get in or out. For instance, some people here have a mixture of a code lock, a regular lock, and another mechanism that I don't have the name for. Others in a section of

the facility that I will never enter, have a complete electronic door. Those are for the more ‘dangerous’ patients and is an extension of this place many miles away from what I come to understand from the pamphlets I finally look at. They have many photos of happy people, while the reality is kind of mixed depending on the person. Overall, it is a lie here. The feeling of normal is just part of perception and perception is nothing but a fever dream. I fiddle with the door in hopes of figuring a way out.

I run my hands across it gently just in case. I feel like if I am too rough with the door that it will scream and cry “Assaulter and an escapee! Arrest her!” That didn’t happen obviously. But the dormant shakes and sweat is what kept the thought there. In fact, as I search the side of the door and look up, I just about die from a heart attack when I see Marta’s face just looking down with her face contorted in confusion.

“You scared me!” I try to tell her through my movements.

“What are you doing?”

Instead of replying I just make gestures that I hope convey the message. I want to ask how she is able to walk about, but I am not sure how to even ask to begin with. She seems to understand my message through my sorry gestures and only gives a short reply.

“Why don’t you just use the door like everyone else? You just have to turn the rotator and pull the handle. They may have replaced the doors, but the way a door operates hasn’t changed.”

I am tired. That is the most obvious mechanical opening. They wouldn’t do that to our doors. Most doors require an ID to open from what it looks like. If it was as simple as that, then anyone could get out. But then again, there is a lot of things that they shouldn’t

do here in my opinion that they do anyway. I decide to give it a try to satisfy her, as if I don't do it, I got a feeling that I am going to hear it. Even though normally she does not say much, she will assert herself and her opinions if she gets an inkling that I disagree. Turning my head to the rotator, I just mess with it until I hear the door make an indication that it is closer to being unlocked. Not that I am an expert at this anyway. I decide to turn it aimlessly and eventually I notice that the door is more relaxed than previously. I stare at the door in surprise. It worked!

“Well? Are you going to open it or just gawk at it?” Marta asked stepping back from the door.

I open the door and feel my stomach move to my throat as I quickly close the door, cover my ears, and kneel on the floor. I wait for what seemed like an eternity and nothing. I slowly cover my ears and look up. Marta is looking at me like I am the one who won the lottery of stupid.

“You good?” She asks, watching me with an eyebrow raised.

All I can manage to do at the moment is to shake my head in the positive.

“All right. Now that you've had your moment with the door and the floor. I am going to the next floor.” she told me.

I wondered why. She never really bothered with me too much. She would talk to me as necessary and unlike others here she never unconsciously put people in a category and acted like they belonged in it. People walked around George like he is made out of glass, I tried not to as I understood. Ever since I been here and people saw my reaction to the bugs here, they have acted the same. I hate it and thus I try to keep it in mind when I am around him. I act and treat George the way I would want people to treat me.

I walk up the stairs as silently as I could.

“Hey! Slowpoke! Come on. You coming or are you trying to get sent somewhere else?” Marta called towards me with her arms crossed.

She is already sitting on a step near the top, waiting for me. I didn’t know exactly where we were going, but I have a feeling it is far from here based on the look on her face. She has a different plan than I do. What that requires I am not sure. She is transfixed forward towards an unknown goal. I feel my eyes drop to the floor and tell myself that what I am seeing is only a distraction caused by the guards. They put the bugs there. It had to be. It could be nothing more than their plot for me to stay more than I needed to. If I were to report such a thing due to the mean guards my stay would be made even longer. Squaring my shoulders, I didn’t look at the walls or floors. They are truly unclean. Along with this whole building. Completely unclean.

I was not; now I am—a few days hence

I shall not be; I fain would look before

And after, but can neither do; some Power

Or lack of power says “no” to all I would.

I stand upon a wide and sunless plain,

Nor chart nor steel to guide my steps aright.

Whene’er, o’ercoming fear, I dare to move,

I grope without direction and by chance.

Some feign to hear a voice and feel a hand

That draws them ever upward thro’ the gloom.

But I—I hear no voice and touch no hand,

Tho' oft thro' silence infinite I list,
And strain my hearing to supernal sounds;
Tho' oft thro' fateful darkness do I reach,
And stretch my hand to find that other hand.
I question of th' eternal bending skies
That seem to neighbor with the novice earth;
But they roll on, and daily shut their eyes
On me, as I one day shall do on them,
And tell me not the secret that I ask.

-*The Mystery* by Paul Laurence Dunbar

We came back to the floor where I was last following that guy who is talking to Robert in the hallway about who knows what. The part of the building that is the cleanest and yet has the most parts unclean to me. Or maybe it is cleaner than I thought. The grey mixed with grey and left parts of the world unlike the rest.

“Come on. You said you wanted to come back here again to check it out for new information or whatever. Right?”

I nod in agreement, but I didn't know if it is safe now. As if sensing my hesitation, she speaks to me.

“You didn't think about safety when you came here last time.”

I didn't. However, that doesn't mean I should be up here. I glance at the bathroom where I saw all those papers. The walls still looked the same and they had recently cleaned some parts of the place. The words on those papers went through my mind especially the last one like an echo: Funding of place is odd according to source x, plus be careful. As I am sure you know by now:

You are being watched., You are being watched., You are being watched. I quickly walked to the stall where the messages were, and I bother with the pipes again. I open the pipes and noticed.....nothing.

There is nothing there in the pipes. Not a single piece of paper or message. In fact, it almost looked functional. I turned back to give Marta an incredulous look, but by that point she is already gone. Vanished into thin air to leave me here with these empty pipes and my thoughts. I had to know where the messages went and who took them. After all, they had to be for somebody if not me. If it is not for me, then I is not meant to see it, and if I is not meant to see it then that is a problem of itself? I need to uncover the secrets.

Placing the shoddy pipe back, I get off my knees and carefully walk out of the bathroom. I walk down the hallway where Marta had led me earlier. It is darker than anything and looking around I see random bugs in the corners. They were less frequent now. Almost calm unlike their previous constant buzzing. The number of bugs kept me standing for a bit, until I heard a voice in my ear.

“Hey. What are you doing?”

I jump ten feet in the air.

“Uh. Nothing. Where did you go?”

“I never left. You were just in your own little world here. As you always are.”

I didn't feel like denying it or giving any more to this conversation. Turning my eyes off her face and the wall I head back responding with only this:

“I am going to head back”

I speed walk back not giving a single thought to how I could speak to her, much less how she could hear me. I have to get off this floor before I get caught. And of course, there is

someone walking down the halls making sure people are where they are supposed to be. I step into a corner out of sight and hold my breath in hope as he won't hear it. It's Robert and I wonder if this guy ever sleeps. He is seemingly always on duty. He does not seem to notice me and only glances around. He looks tired himself. They need to give him more break time so I don't have to run into him in the hallway.

Waiting for him to get out of here seemed like an eternity. He for a time is concentrated on his smartwatch. Scrolling and looking at who knows what and checking in on charts. For who knows what reason. And just when I think he is going to leave someone who for who knows what reason is still awake and begins talking to him! I feel my eyes go farther in my skull and I sit on my knees. My shoes are nonexistent and have been for some time. They give us slippers to walk around for the most part, others have some type of shoes, but there are no laces. I took these instead. I didn't want lace less shoes. There is already a uniform of sorts for us. It is more hospital like than anything, but better than our clothes who get washed who knows when. At least these are theirs and they want us to look decent enough with them. Most of the time.

While waiting for their conversation to end I can feel my feet falling asleep. I just wish they would let me out of here. Then I see something I don't believe. Robert is opening the door and letting him out! He is walking side by side with him and talking about everything as if this is nothing and just normal! We are not supposed to be out after nine. There are no real excuses as they don't even care if you have to use the bathroom in the middle of the night. I should know. Yet here is this guy, whose name I long forgotten walking and talking like everyone outside. While me and everyone else are stuck in our boxes. I can only sense the buzz again in my ear. *They are moving and inching towards the floors.*

I get up slowly and test out my feet. They have both fallen asleep. I try to move quickly on my feet silently to get the blood flowing back to them. Careful that my feet make as little noise as possible and just as I am about to step forward. I feel a tap on my shoulder. *Marta*. It had to be here. It is usually her that suddenly appeared. Bracing myself, I turned and ready to see her. Instead I see someone else. Someone I never seen before in my life.

The dude is towering over me like he is born on stilts. He has short blonde hair. His blue eyes are staring at me, intense and riddled with threats.

“Who are you?”

“I could ask you the same.”

“I asked first.”

“Penny. And you are?”

“You don’t need to know. Quit lurking on this floor. It won’t be good for you to stay up here.”

Ok edgelord.

“Sure. I will keep that in mind. Bye.”

I turn and before three minutes had reached its mark I looked back. He is heading back in his room. The plate on his door read: *Alexeev*. Where is he from?

I can vaguely see him with a flashlight and looking at something with a pen. Maybe he wrote the messages. Deciding to completely ignore him. I decide to come back tomorrow and see if I can find out who has been doing this and why. Especially if it is edgelord. He cannot be trustworthy with that look and attitude. Hoping no one else decides to make a surprise appearance I creep down the stairs and slink back into my room. Unnoticed and with a new plan in mind so that people suspect nothing.

Then I was a safe house
for the problem that chose me.

Like pure math, my results
were useless for industry:
not a clear constellation,
a scattered cluster, a bound
gap. When I looked I found
an explorer bent. Love
never dies a natural death.

It happens in a moment.

Everything hinges on
a delicate understanding.

Even the most trusted caregiver
is only trusted for so long.

-Wrong Question by Lisa Olstein

I begin my day with a headache. I didn't sleep much due to my constant ideas floating around in my head and I just want more sleep. But as always, we all have to get up to the flash of a bright light that if you were crazy enough you would think there would be a new coming of Jesus and for all I know someone might be.

Dragging myself near the guard and going about my daily routine is just even more tiring than usual. Not only did I decide to go to bed late. I also feel more paranoid. What if edgelord tells on me? He better not. Cause how would he see my ass in the corner of the hallway? He had

to be out there too. He would be in big trouble. Or at least that is what I would hope for. But knowing some of the staff in this place, they would only come for me and leave him alone. Which is bullshit, but that is life. I sit in my appointment with Dr. Johnson and I try to act all normal. Like I have always been great and never snuck out my own room. But I look past Johnson, I am bored, he is talking about my progress or whatever and what I see puts me on edge.

It is Marta sitting in on my own therapy session. Looking at Johnson's collection of books and collectable that he has on the shelf and admiring some of them like they contained a special memory. A special spot in her mind. And just her presence alone gave me chills. It made my legs tense up as what if she says something? Why is she here? Noticing my reaction, Johnson seems to look back and looks utterly confused.

"What is it Ms. Bronze?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I was just surprised at your collection is all. Some of the movies are very old."

"Yeah. I am a pretty big fan of many Disney memorabilia. I got stuff from the 1950's and well you can see the collection." he replies starting to relax and smile.

"I used to watch some of these a long time ago. Although many have since been dropped from circulation." I reply trying to appear friendly.

"Yes, that is quite a shame. They were great works. Although some were controversial to some. They were worth it." he said with a smile on his face.

Luckily for me the timer on his desk went off. He turns to his desk and seems surprised at how the time went by. For me, it went very slow.

“Well, this is faster than our average sessions. It seems you are gradually improving. Hopefully soon, these sessions will prove to be useful to your mental health and your progress continues.” he stated.

“Thanks, Dr. Johnson.” I reply getting ready to step out.

“See you next time.” he replies writing more notes while not looking at me.

I wonder if he can tell if my responses are somewhat false. Or if that I am not telling him anything that is happening. How much can he really know about me? I square my shoulders and prepared to head to my destination. If this is what they are looking for, then I will act accordingly. For the goal is within my reach.

Fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race,
 Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours,
 Whose speed is but the heavy Plummets pace;
 And glut thy self with what thy womb devours,
 Which is no more then what is false and vain,
 And meerly mortal dross;
 So little is our loss,
 So little is thy gain.
 For when as each thing bad thou hast entomb'd,
 And last of all, thy greedy self consum'd,
 Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss
 With an individual kiss;
 And Joy shall overtake us as a flood,
 When every thing that is sincerely good

And perfectly divine,
With Truth, and Peace, and Love shall ever shine
About the supreme Throne
Of him, t'whose happy-making sight alone,
When once our heav'nly-guided soul shall clime,
Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,
Attir'd with Stars, we shall for ever sit,
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time.

-On Time by John Milton

It has been a few weeks since I saw Robert and the other patients intermingling. My plan is slowly moving into fruition. I believe that I am slowly gaining enough trust to hopefully look at things from the outside. I hope to soon gain the privileges that the ones near the noted bathroom have gained. I have acted more or less as they expect me to. Soon I will learn the basis of it all as to what is what happening here altogether. Then maybe then, I will feel complete.

This place creates an emptiness for me. Maybe it works for others. Marta came to visit and told me last night that I am projecting what I feel about this place towards others. And yet, I wonder how much of that is true. Many of the people here do in fact treat people very badly. Almost as if we were of no human mind at all. Many would expect them to understand the human mind more than anyone and yet they understand nothing about it, at least from my perspective. The most they understand is that we may not be similar to them or to most people. This difference is what annoys me. The supposed difference created by them. And their

perception of us always changes. The more information they acquire somehow always changes in how they treat us.

My great-great aunt is in an institution for most of her life. I is told that she is forever attached to many wires and taking medications that at times she refused to take from what I heard. In photos her mouth is always in a straight line and she would look at the camera without truly looking. Her hair came down in cascades of somewhat curly and wavy brown hair. It had streaks of gold in her brown hair. Her eyes in the old photographs were either a hazel or green. The heritage that came out in her, didn't come out in me. Not that it would. She is said to be great in math, but my grandmother said her mind took that away in the end. I remember like it was yesterday how my grandmother described her:

“She used to go around and state things that weren't quite right. It is like her mind organized a new world where we could only see one part. They tried to get her where that world would not take over into ours, but they just never quite could. Some days she would be laughing with us and be the way she used to and others she would suspect us and hate us for what we in her mind had done.”

It made me feel bad for her. I know that is not something she would want someone to feel about her. After all, no one wants pity, ever. The impact she made is the same regardless of how different it is to mine. They are similar enough that I imagine in my late-night, or early morning depending on your view of time, dreams and hopes to eventually get to the restroom that I feel her pain. The pain of being isolated here. As in the end, she is more alone than the tree in my parent's backyard. It was a sampling when I was growing up. I doubt they have done anything with the tree, and it is as solitary as it always has. Yet it continues to grow strong. Much of the pesticides that my parents use doesn't affect it.

The flowers in the tree continue to grow and are at large. They were pink and were in bunches. Constantly creating a sweet scent in the fall. The careful scent that carried sweet memories of long ago. It is also the same tree that my grandmother planted in memory of her aunt. Her aunt loved to garden at one point. She could plant anything, and it could flourish no matter the environment. It was like she is breathing life into the plants. The succession of all these plants were brought to a halt by the cockroach. The cockroach who appears everywhere and eats the dreams like he is the guard of the mind. Eating all the good and bad dreams that he can without restraint and precaution. Soon, I will be sneaking my way back to the floor. I have planned to do it tonight and see what I can find out. That guy will not stop me.

The cafeteria is busy as always during mealtime and I sneak pieces of food into my uniform so that anyone who saw me would stay quiet. They shouldn't get in my way of this. This is not something I will give up on. I will find out more information tonight. I shove three pieces of Little Debbie's in my bag and that should be enough. I learned that they have less guards on Thursdays. There is no real reason for it it seems. At least from my perspective. You would think with how many of us they consider problematic that they would hire more people, but it's my luck that they don't.

The time once again turned nine at night and it is lights out. I prepared the food I hid strategically for anyone in particular and quietly step out. On my way to the stairwell I see Marta waiting for me.

The floor is silent and clean as usual on this floor. The doors have some art that someone made on them. I presume the ones who live in the room made them. Some you can tell what they drew and others you would have to guess. Walking past the edgelord's room I take a glance in and....he isn't there. There is no one to be seen. Where did he go? I have to be more careful now

that I know there may be other people doing the same thing that I am. Maybe he is looking to make sure I don't walk about. Maybe he is telling my business to a supervisor. Maybe he is with them and is hiding the information too. How much does he know about me? I begin to walk faster in the hallway and the bugs are buzzing louder than they have in a while. I am going past the bathroom, and even farther down a corner, where I see a large corner of offices. One of them has a light on. I feel my heart beating through my rib cage. In the office there is an array of snacks near a fridge. And in front of the computer is a group of three people who I recognize immediately: Robert, Random guy with the curly hair and the Edgelord that I am avoiding. They are all looking at it rather intensely and are pointing at it vaguely and making remarks. I want to know what they are looking at so I try to get myself at an angle where I can see it. I put my body at an angle where I am sure they could not see me through a reflection on the computer or otherwise. I still could not see it regardless of the angle and my brow furrowed. I squatted down on the floor near a window and a vent. I tried to see if I at least could catch a word of what they were saying.

“Edgar, what is up with the file? Have you unlocked it?” Robert said to the one I refer to as edgelord.

He has a name. Good for him. His voice is different now than how I usually hear it. It has a different intonation and accent. How did he hide it this entire time? Especially one that strong. He has got to be from farther up north than here. Maybe New Jersey or something.

“I am trying to Bob. It takes a while. Be patient for once.”

The one now called Edgar, rather than edgelord, replied. His eyebrows are furrowed, and his mouth is in a tight straight line. His shoulders are stooped low and his sleeves are rolled up to slightly above his elbows.

“Bob has never been patient in his entire life, and you know it.” the one who Robert, now ‘Bob’, always talks to in the hallway replies.

“Jack. This is due soon. I am not pressuring anyone for the hell of it.” Bob replied.

The one that is usually talking to Robert in the hallway is called Jack. Robert looks more serious than I’ve ever seen him. Usually when I see him, he is either looking like he is in auto mode and in a frantic hurry to do whatever he has to do. Robert almost looks familiar in this light, but anyone does I guess if you’re around long enough. His face looks paler than normal. Almost like he has makeup on his face. But makeup is not allowed on staff. The only reason I know this is because of that intern nurse who got fussed out for it.

“Sure man. You just found this a few days ago and drag our asses at fuck it o’ clock. Whatever you want man” Jack replies in a big sarcastic tone.

I have to cover up a snicker, the tone in itself is amusing. He almost looked like he is telling a joke, but Robert does not look like he is in the mood for it. He looks very tired. Even more tired than some of the staff here. His eyes have like three bags on them alone. His stomach looks oddly misplaced and he is looking at many places while also keeping track of their progress. The hell are they doing?

“Watch it, Jack. Now is not the time to joke around.” ‘Bob’ replied.

“I know. Calm down. No need to get grouchy.” Jack replied finding a chair to lounge in.

He seemed to be the most relaxed out of everyone there. I get the idea that he doesn’t take much serious and is laidback. He begins to play with things on Robert’s desk and tosses it between his hands. His legs are laid straight out and crossed in a weird way. I never noticed how much hair he had. It is packed with curls and compacted on his head.

“Not grouchy. Just telling.” replied Bob while turning a page in a folder while he took another chair, brought it closer to Edgar and sat in it.

He sits differently than others, straight as an arrow. His legs are neither crossed nor spread apart like the many men who sat on the subway. While Jack seems about to respond, before he can there is a knock on a wall.

“Hey, pizzas here.” a man said jollily.

He is the most different than everyone else. His hair is styled short and it is dyed pink and blue. His outfit is very casual in that he is wearing a hoodie with fast food stains on it with jeans and sandals. His sandals look old and are reminiscent of the sixties. His jeans have a few holes in them. I cannot tell if he cut them out himself or if he bought them like that. They also have random stains on it from who knows what. Maybe he wiped his hands on his pants or had the pizza on his lap or something.

“Larry, why are you here?” Bob asks as he took a slice of pepperoni pizza.

I become jealous. It’s been many months since I had pizza. I could feel my brain crave it, but I couldn’t get caught. Why do I have to see food that I haven’t had in ages? This isn’t fair to anyone. Just by seeing it makes me imagine its smell. I have to focus on something else or I will try to sneak pizza and that is not quite possible.

“Well, you know Rob, I thought you might need a hand since it seems progress is a little slow.” he said it with a smirk that screamed that he could do better.

It makes my brain scream send it back, send it back. He also called Robert by a different name. It’s better than Bob in my opinion. Not that it mattered. His comment seems to bother Edgar by quite a bit. He types even louder on the computer. He seems more agitated by his

presence and his posture gives the idea that if he moved then his entire joints would pop, if you could move him.

“Larry, that’s enough.” he replies, pinching the bridge of his nose and his eyes were shut.

Is he also annoyed by his behavior or just tired? Regardless, his words seemed to have little effect on him. He is directly staring at Edgar with a half grin and it gave me the feeling that he would continue to push someone’s buttons until they were near close to punching him.

“Ah, Come on, Rob. I am just joking with him. No harm happened.” he said slinging his arm on Edgar’s shoulder.

He stops for a couple seconds and went back to typing. He looks like he wanted to rip his arm out. Larry responds by putting more weight on his shoulder. Then proceeded to look at Robert with a vague expression that I couldn’t decipher.

“Larry.” Robert gives him a look that sent the message that said: Knock it off.

Larry casually got his weight and arm off Edgar and moves near to where Robert is sitting. He sits on a computer chair and uses Robert’s lap as a leg rest. Which creates an irritated look from Robert’s end, but he didn’t do anything. Larry tries to reach for Robert’s folder, but Robert holds it away and only replied that the folder’s contents are confidential and only selected personnel could see it. Which caused a fake disappointed look from Larry. He just looks bored to exist there.

“Man, I came to help blondie with his work and he’s not giving me a chance, Rob. I can’t be an errand boy. I don’t get paid for this.” complaining dramatically seems to be his expertise. When he did his dramatic movement, I notice that a few of his nails were sloppy painted in magenta. It is as if a kid painted it. Some parts of the paint were already chipped off. I wonder if it is chipped off due to time or due to typing. If it could come off that way at all. It had been

years since I applied any and often times, they were just gel French tips that I could just put on and call a day.

“I didn’t ask for your help. Your way of code is obsolete and for absolute grandpas!” Edgar replies quickly and something had flashed on his screen causing his attention to shoot back.

He immediately put a USB drive in his computer and types some more. His eyes are focused on the screen and whatever is on the screen is quickly moving like a script.

“Code no matter the age is not for grandpas. It adapts, it doesn’t turn and change completely like the humanities.” Larry explains looking intent on the screen himself bringing himself closer to the screen to see.

“Will you all keep it down? I am not getting caught due to your loud mouth.” the quiet tone sent the rest into a more solemn atmosphere.

In a way it reminds me of my old boss. The way he seemed to be always serious, but that may just be something they have in common. The way they are in person is just similar. But it may just be me. There is a lot of differences between them as well. Robert has no hair with blue and his eyebrows seem to be blonde or something. While my boss had lightly wavy brown hair and amber-ish or maybe brown looking eyes. His eyes were a color that seemed to shift with his mood, while Robert’s just looked blue.

“Quiet hours at midnight? No party for these folks huh?” Larry makes a joke, but it seems to fail on Robert’s ears. He doesn’t laugh or twitch a single muscle. Not that I blame him. The joke is lame. In fact, Robert seems to give him a somewhat ugly look and states:

“Most people in facilities like this are in bed by ten or eleven. Theirs start at nine pm, and at the moment it is midnight. Most people who are here for a while are trying to rest. Keep Quiet.”

“Come on Rob. Chill. What are they going to do?” he said with a joking look.

Robert again didn't seem interested in his bait. In fact, he moved forward in his chair and slapped Larry on the back of the head and gives him an iPad.

“Play games while we finish up, everyone moves back by one am.” he said seemingly to the entire room.

X

Robert

Larry is getting on my nerves. He is not supposed to be here while I am gathering information. I have not gotten good sleep in a while. He is being stupid. The problem at least from what we have seen in the files so far is higher up. Not really with the facility itself. While most of the complaints are true and frankly disgusting, the others I can't tell truth from fiction.

I have been staring at these words across the screen that Edgar managed to dredge up when I am able to during breaks when no one is there. Jack does what he can in the hallways. He plays his part and sends the message through another channel. It is always on traceable paper though. I told him to try other means, but he says that under this environment we need to take what we can get. I have a headache and it is irritated. After all my time in the marines, this is where I get stuck?

If the others found out who I was really working for they would change and would ruin the evidence. I have worked too long on this for it to go to shit. Larry being loud along with whoever is hiding outside is not helping.

X

My legs fell asleep some time ago. I begin to leave, before I think I am caught by them.

I can't move. My legs are dead weight and they can't move. I feel myself begin to sweat. I have to drag myself to a different spot before I can force the blood back into my legs. I lay myself entirely flat on the floor, although it is dirty. I would rather face the dirt than the consequences of being caught knowing a piece of whatever they are doing. I figured out some pieces, but not the whole and I am not going to find out tonight. I know that Robert and some patients are doing an investigation or some research on something regarding this facility. But why are they hiding? And why are they doing this? I know that much for sure. I will probably have to try in the middle of the day when there is no one in here.

"Educate the weak and lowly let them hear theses sounds Give sight to them so they may see the blood On this scroll of parchment that John spoke of His written word of three of the sixteenth on this scroll" Unknown in *Tarry Not Time is Running Out*

Dragging myself against the floor is the hardest thing in a long time and it takes forever for me to get myself away from the vent and further into the hallway. Once I get near the bathrooms, I pick up one leg with my hands and drop it onto the ground. That hurt like a bitch. I feel a jolt go through my leg and it tingled after it met the ground. I have to continue to do it or I would never leave here.

I try to do it as quietly as I can. If someone wakes up or if a guard gets here, then I will be in more trouble than I ever have here. I will probably be moved elsewhere, have more security and who knows what else. I don't trust most of the staff. Being in trouble here just is not a fun time for anyone whatsoever as the consequence depends on who catches you and for what.

I slowly shuffled to where I needed to go. It took me what seemed to be twenty minutes to get to my room. I slowly opened my door and shut it and passed out asleep. Any thoughts that I have on the matter could wait until tomorrow.

The guards had to shake me awake when it is time to get up. I wake up to the headache of a lifetime. Dragging myself to my activities today is going to be a pain in the ass. I could handle doing this every once in a while, but not as much as I would like. How do the guards and nurses handle being assigned the third shift? I tried the essence of it once and I couldn't hack it. The ideal would be that I wrap up and get into his office quickly to steal the information I need. But the way that I am right now having to be basically led to my appointments and jobs, I don't think I could grab the right thing. All I can do right now is hold out for a break in between the sessions in my schedule. The next one will be an appointment with Charlene and I don't look forward to it in the slightest. Time is slowly ticking by for me and I just wish to sleep. The bed that I have, I have gotten accustomed to with its scratchy blankets that always smell like cheap soap.

While in my art session I could feel myself falling between nodding off and jolting awake while attempting to paint still life of the garden outside. The flowers were wilting still, but I am going to paint them as if they are alive and healthy.

I attempt to paint them with all my might and gradually little by little my painting brush finds itself a little lower on the canvas than it should. It created a myriad of strokes of faded yellow. That is the color of the flowers outside. Or at least that is what I decided. I could not tell what the original color is meant to be. As my strokes kept getting lower in my last jolt to reality, I noticed that I got paint on my pants. A nice aged yellow streak across my knee. Just what I needed.

Shaking myself out the constant state of in and out of reverie, I is about to attempt for a different shade of yellow to give accents to my flower petals.

“Woops. Sorry, I didn’t mean to bump into your cup.” Jack said as a lot of water came down onto the yellow that I just mixed together.

Completely diluting it. It became an even lighter faded yellow that I could not use for the pedals whatsoever.

“No problem.” I said through tight lips.

I couldn’t exactly be this mad at an accident. As much as I wanted to scream and yell, I had a profile to keep. I couldn’t let this guy get me. Not yet anyway. Besides if I explode then all the work I just put in will be for nothing. I will be set back to square one. The trust I have built will be gone and all the information that I gained will be useless and I won’t be able to learn anything else. For now, I will pretend like I don’t know him. Even as I saw him do random things throughout my stay.

I continued my work on the painting like I invested my life into it and it just got worse and worse.

My skills of painting the flowers were awful. There were various random strokes everywhere due to me constantly falling asleep. It looked like a cat had swished their tail in some paint and only parts of the hair touched the painting. This is in all parts of the painting in various colors. The flowers looked droopy, in need of water, and like the light just vanquished them on sight.

“Damn, you suck at this huh?” I heard Jack say this while leaning over staring directly at my work. Can he not?

“That is debatable. I think my work looks great.” I said while pretending to appraise it. I don’t personally like my art, but he isn’t about to know that. Especially since he made fun of it in front of me.

“Well, your taste in art is debatable.” He left the room after that.

Why he started talking to me with the ego, I don’t know. I put the art supplies away in their proper tubs with the exception of my paint brushes. They need to be washed a certain way. I wait in line to wash the brushes because I am not the only one taking their time to do things. Most people didn’t want to leave their activities very fast as it meant going back to their room or going to an activity less enjoyable.

The people in front of me are talking about food. Not that I meant to eavesdrop on them. They were just in front of me. Luckily for them it is my turn to get soap, but they still had to be loud enough for me to hear them.

“Did you hear what happened on the third floor?”

“Yeah, there were all these random sweets”

“Yeah, how the hell did they get out and get extra snacks? I wish that is me!”

“Who care about the getting out part? More like why would they? There is nothing to do at night. All there is around this place is guards and nurses lurking in these empty and sometimes dusty hallways.”

“Man, it’s not about the why. It’s about the ability. Think of all the things you can get before everyone else.”

“You say that because you’re selfish.”

“Whatever man. You know you would do it if you had the chance.”

Hearing their conversation made my stomach drop. I left shit? I hurriedly clean my brushes and leave the room. The guards guide me back to my room and I collapse on my bed. Now that I found myself on my bed, I cannot sleep at all. Especially learning that I left all that evidence out there. Although I am not planning to go out during the nighttime again. The idea that it more than likely is no longer open, makes me more nervous than ever. What if they can tie it to me? What would happen then?

But gradually bit by bit, the sleepiness I had been feeling all day took over and I cannot keep it at bay. I fought it for a while, but in the end my exhaustion won against my anxious mind. As my feelings grew the bugs grew louder in the walls.

Deep in the shelves of shadows,
I closed the book I hadn't read.
Who wanted for food

when you could smuggle something
snatched from the jaws of the vending machine
into the library of the dead?

Down on my shoulder came a hand:
my late mother's, turned to ash.
In the house where she died,

we would sit, not speaking,
even in eternity: she had her book
and pressed one upon me, companionably.

Everything had shrunk
to fit in a suitcase when I left.
The past had been ironed flat,

a thousand leaves starched and pinned
to a cottonwood just a shade of its former self,
the only sound its rustle, industrious,

leaves turning waxen, unread—
though no shelf lay empty
in the library of the dead.

-The Vacant lot at the End of the Street by Debora Greger

I am woken this time by Marta. She left me in the middle of the hallway while I was collecting evidence with no explanation at all. It made me angry. If she told me about the time then I would have left earlier. If I had left earlier, then my legs would not have fallen asleep. If they hadn't, I wouldn't have fell down the stairs and left all that food there for everyone to find and marvel at. I didn't want to give people ideas. I didn't even want them to realize it is possible to sneak out. I wanted to scold her for it and ask her why she left, but the expression on her face made me think before I said a word. She looked angrier than I ever seen her.

"You left a lot of stuff behind. Do you know what that means?" she strongly whispers in my ear.

"Yeah, it means no more of running out at lights out. Besides we don't need that anymore," I explained as quietly as I could, "I got enough information from that, I just need to sneak into Robert's office later." I just need to see what information he has based off what he is doing. If he is doing what I think he is. It will prove that this place isn't updated enough.

"You need to sneak into Robert's office?" she has a giant smirk on her face like she thinks it is impossible. I have gotten used to her responses by this point. They are usually like this, sarcastic and at times just condescending.

"Yes, I will be doing that. And I will get the information I need and figure out the situation with this place and me." I cross my arms while maintaining eye contact. Shifting my legs from straight on the floor to my left leg being crossed over my right leg.

"And how will you see this information that he supposedly has in his office?" Her hand on her hip now and stared at me back with the same intensity that I gave her.

"I don't know. I will find a way how. There are many people here who know how to do things."

I didn't want to hear about the supposed holes in my plan. I have gotten this far. Why should I stop now? I kept up all this work to determine all this and no one is going to stop me because I made a stupid slip up of dropping some packaged chocolate.

"Well, don't let it bite you in the butt then, and don't fall." Her mouth is in a straight line and it reminds me of Robert's face yesterday. While he is working with the group.

Does she have similar feelings that he does while working with me? If she does, I hope I am not the Larry of this group. That would make me feel more shame than dropping all that chocolate already does.

Right when I am going to start to plan the steps the door to my room opens. Robert appears and is wearing glasses today. He also seems tired. More tired than me. He has more eye bags than I do and looks even paler, if that is possible for him. I wonder if he is getting sick. He is wearing khakis and a polo shirt with the institute's logo today. That makes a bad contrast with his overall outfit today.

"It is time for your appointment, Ms. Bronze."

Usually Robert had some emotion to his voice and is even excited to interact with others, but today, he seemed to have most of the life energy drained out of him.

"Ok. Um, are you feeling okay today?" I ask and I don't really get a response.

He just continues to walk by my side to the office and knocks on the door. The door springs open and Dr. Mores is there waiting for me with an interesting look on her face. I didn't know it yet, but the facility is going to be harsher on me and my life here in some way. I should have connected it to the incidents that I created, but I couldn't.

"Come in, Penelope." Her voice is hard.

She didn't often call me by my first name. Most times she either called me by my last name or my nickname. Today she reminded me of my mother when she is angry at the time when I snuck out of the house to go to the mall with my friends. This time, however, does not include my mother.

“Hello.”

Cautiously I say hello. The room is somewhat dark, and her face had such a frown etched in it that if I were to stand outside of myself, I would want to run.

“Penelope. Your behavior recently seems to be vastly different than usual. Your sleep schedule, according to the guards, is unprecedented. You are sleeping more often. As well, you seem to be more to yourself. Tell me, Penelope: Are you depressed? Or are you the one making errands at night? We have been searching for the one who has been running around at night and well, we have a few ideas.”

They have a few ideas? Like what? Who did it? I begin sweating on the back of my neck and I shifted my legs with my hands put together on my knee. And tried to keep control of my racing thoughts.

“Oh. Recently I have just been more tired than average. I keep hearing someone talking at night and it has been consistently happening at the same time recently.” I tell her while trying to keep my cool. The only thing I hope for at this point is that I didn't look ultra-sweaty and nervous. If I didn't have enough of that appearance already standing in front of her right now.

“I see. Would you be able to identify who is talking outside of your door?” she is stern in her wording, and she leans even closer to me.

Her eyes are intensifying in her gaze towards her face. It seems like a lighthouse of ice towards my soul.

“I probably would not. I tried to cover my ears. I just wanted to sleep for the next day.” I try to explain to her. I hope that I can get my prescriptions and leave.

“I see. So, do you think it is loud enough to disturb any of the people in your hall?” she asked leaning farther back on her chair and quickly taking notes on a random piece of paper.

“I wouldn’t know.” I respond as I truly don’t know how much they know and what they know. I only found out they knew some info, but they didn’t reveal much as to what they were doing. I am glad they didn’t because I don’t want to know how much they know, at least not until I leave here.

She sighs to herself and taps her pencil on her desk, “You don’t know a single thing?”, she looks directly at me with her eyes unwavering, calmly evaluating the situation and my reactions and I calmly to the best tell her: “No. I don’t.”

I genuinely don’t know how I found this resolve or even where it came from. I kept everything to myself. Little did I realize the consequences of how little I told those around me would be detrimental later.

“Despair is impossible in humans. They often are deceived by hope, but are also deceived by the notion of despair.”- *Pandora’s Box* by Osamu Dazai

I walk down the hallway in the facility with a different guard. Robert left to go somewhere, I guess. I would rather be stuck with him than someone else than the current guard that I have now. The current guard smells of Cheetos and corn chips. In other words, he kind of smells. Robert at least just smells like soap or coffee. There is no in-between. Eventually, I get to my room and I am finally free.

Waiting for me in my room is Marta in the background messing with my desk. Before I can ask her what she is doing, I feel a tap on my shoulder and I nearly shit myself. I quickly turn around and see Edgar in front of my face.

“How did you get in here?” I attempt to look more tough by putting my hands on my hips.

“I got in here the same way I believe you got out. By twisting the knobs.” he responded and is in full uniform of the place. He is accusing me of going upstairs and dropping the food. While I did do this, I am not admitting anything to him. I am not about it.

“I didn’t go anywhere. Why would you think I have?” I ask with enough indigence that I hope it makes him question his sanity into his thought as to whether I was actually there or not. The moment I said the phrase his mouth begins to have deep lines down his face. He looks even more tired than Robert did, when I asked him how he is doing. I wonder how much my incident hurt whatever they were doing. If it bothered anything at all. They might just be paranoid and anxious.

“Sure. Go with that story. Just be glad that Rob took the tapes with you in the frame.” he said with a smirk on his face. I didn’t have much to respond other than denial.

“And how would you say it is me, when I was here, in my bed.”

He looks directly at me and then grabs something out of his uniform, and I positioned myself immediately to kick him in the balls. I didn’t trust him yesterday and I don’t trust him today.

“I am not going to do anything but show you this.” he brought out a phone and clicked the play button on it.

On the screen is me moving and squatting on the floor and leaning against a wall looking like a brachiosaurus looking at the window in the middle of the hallway. Or as a Southern friend of my mom would say: “rubber-necking at what is happening in the window in the hallway.”

“I can’t quite see who that is, I am afraid. But that can’t be me.” I reply quickly.

I am not about to give in. If I am going to keep up my story, I am going to die doing it. His eyes seem to have a message that is running across them at me. Basically, telling me that he didn’t believe my story.

“Yeah, and SpongeBob is never on Nickelodeon. Try to come again and continue watching.” he said even more serious than before.

The video continues and I am shown switching my body and facing the camera. Most of my face is shown, but it is covered in shadows due to lights out. The only part that is visible to the viewer is my hair color and maybe a few discernable features. They still could not prove it is me. It could be a number of people with similar features. The camera is too far to get a complete one over of my face. Then that same person, crawled on their belly and crawled down out of sight of the first camera. Then the next video began to start playing, but he paused it only stating: “Are you sure this isn’t you?”

“Yes, there is no way that is me.”

I know more about legal policies than they give me credit for. I know bits and pieces of legal policy from the documents I had to read back at my job. They can’t get me for uncertainties like this.

“You see, *Penelope*. I think it is you. I have seen you there before and I had to get you to go away. What evidence do you have that it isn’t you this time?” he states seeming just as confident as before.

He left an opening for me.

“Pardon? Did you just imply that you were out in the hallway, out of your room after lights out?”

He blanches slightly as he knew what I meant, but he still has a determined look in his eye.

“The others may not have figured out this, but I know you were there. Don’t you deny it. I saw you from my room and I had to chastise you from the hallway.” he states, but I know he himself is lying now. I never talked to him in his room. He is trying to make me question my own memory. No one is going to do that to me.

“It seems you’re in staying a while for a reason though this place is not the best suited for that. In fact, this place stinks. I can’t even draw a picture with a regular pencil or pen without the head guard breathing down my neck. I am afraid I wasn’t where you think I was. And I don’t even know where your room is.”

I let the words echo through him and I can easily tell by the etches on his face that this sentence is nowhere near the one he is wanting to hear from me. He steps even closer to me in the instance and that made me even more nervous. He needs to get out. Where is the guard when you need him? Do they ever do their job correctly? My mind immediately answers for me in response. No, no they don’t.

“You know that is not true.” he had a dark intonation to his words that I didn’t like.

I wasn’t about his threat to me so I did the last thing I thought I would ever do in this place: I scream like I am about to die, screaming about things that Johnson claimed I did, fitting in how they saw me. Someone who can only scream about something that either is in the room or

not. Regardless, they want it quiet. That is the only time they ever responded to anything in this place so quickly.

Some guards immediately bust through my door. It is if they waited their whole life to do this. I imagined this is how prisoners felt. Locked forever and led to their destination. They have to, like we do, trust those who are responsible for us and the well-being that we are striving for inside.

Within moments Edgar and I are pressed down on the floor. I am hoisted up and taken to another room. I am pressed against the wall. I then am subjected to a humiliating strip search where they found nothing. Along with many questions that I don't feel like answering. My heart dropped to my stomach when I heard them mention a cavity search to see if I am the one smuggling food. They must have been nearby and are suspicious.

Just when they are about to start, someone bursts through the door.

"All of you out. Now. This is not permitted, nor part of the normal procedure."

It is Robert. He immediately grabs the guard who is holding me and forcibly kicks him out and gently gives me my clothes. He tells everyone to leave and that the head will hear about what they did and all of them glare at him and another tries to tell him to mind his business. Robert doesn't respond to his commentary other than demanding them to get the hell out.

Robert turns away from me and faces a corner. He gives me privacy to change and that is the most human way that I have been treated since I came here.

X

Robert

The guards are getting nasty. They have gotten worse with stress and lack of checks. At least some of them. The nurses tend to be decent at least. Most of the time. This is making me

question more things that when I was at war. I doubt the families know much. They can only be told so much anyway. But if I were to find out a family member of mine were treated like this I would either fight them myself or sue. Probably both. If they caught me when I wasn't in my forties I would. But things are almost done and soon, this treatment, at least here, will be over with.

X

“The most important kind of freedom is to be what you really are. You trade in your reality for a role. You trade in your sense for an act. You give up your ability to feel, and in exchange, put on a mask. There can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first.”-Jim Morrison

“I do apologize about this. This is among the most unacceptable things that have happened here. I will talk to a supervisor about this, I will leave names out though. Your privacy here is important.”

Robert states this with finality. He looks forward with his shoulders straightened out. He looks like a soldier.

“It's not your fault. You don't have to talk to supervisor though. Once I get out I can do something myself.” I tell him this lightly. No one really bothered to tell other people and the ones who have found out quickly the normal response: They went down the hole again and it is a new cycle and the cockroach gave a big ugly laugh. It is if it is in mockery to what is being said or done in hopes of those like us. Those in progress, those who don't know what to do or how to move on, the deniers and those put in the wrong box as the constant cycle of what they see as illness may not be such at all.

Once the response finally reached him, he stops in the middle of the hallway and turns towards me with an indecipherable look. It looked like the largest crossword appeared across his eyes and the definitions were known only by a select few. His eyes are what struck me. They switched from brown to an amber-ish color most of the time and now I saw his eye color for certain under this light with little shadow of a doubt: They were the brightest amber yellow mixed with brown tints in his eye. I never thought people could have eyes like that. Most of the time I saw this color I thought people only had this color in cartoons. But the place could never be a cartoon. It is the barbed reality that fenced people through sections of knowledge that is both wanted and unwanted. Where the person being kept in is you.

“You shouldn’t do this type of thing alone. People should know and rather than one voice there should be comfort to do multiple. But the way this place is run, there will be few. They will be too embarrassed to show. There are multiple cases when someone on the inside like yourself tries to speak out and they don’t listen and then all of a sudden, they listen when a person who has never been inside here does. Let me assist in this. It will get farther if it is more than one person.” Robert states this like it was a matter of a fact. His eyes burn like coals about it and I had the feeling that I wouldn’t be able to convince him otherwise.

“What would you know about this? You are a guard or something like that right?” I respond back even if I can’t argue to get him to leave it all alone. I know he can’t know what it is like. He is a guard, a person leading people around in this place. If he truly wanted to help, he should have stepped in a long time ago.

“That may be so. I may not understand everything in this place; however, it is imperative to start things now, rather than an unknown date don’t you think? For all you know, Dr. Mores and Johnson will keep pushing your release date back by telling the officials that you are not

mentally able to do what you need to outside of this facility. Then your plan there will be pushed back and what then?"

My lips turn downward. Is he speaking down to me? I appreciate his thought, but he is talking to me like I would never leave here and see the sunlight. That I would spend most of my days with Johnson and everyone else just to eventually be let out when they find it convenient. My face must have been evident to him as he seemed to change his tune some. I ask him what happened to Edgar out of curiosity.

"He is fine. He got away from them. Also, I don't mean to be rude. It's just this is all just bad. They treat everyone like monkeys at the will of the puppeteer."

His statement afterwards just makes him ruder. We have free will. We are able to do things like everyone else in the world. Some people just have more problems with adjusting than others. Still yet I could hear the cockroach laughing.

The sun intensified through the hallway that we passed through. It is one of the few with windows. It shines bright on him, making him look pale again. He has periods where I am uncertain in how to truly describe him. His looks always shift from one way to another. Sometimes I wonder if what I perceive is happening in front of me. People don't shift in appearance. At least that is what Dr. Mores told me. She says people can purposely alter their appearance through makeup and costumes, but just shift from hour to hour in front of you. I still argue they can. Depending on the side they show you their outward appearance shows something different.

"Would you like something to drink, like soda, tea, or lemonade?" Robert asks me while going towards his office where they have drinks. The choices in my mind became a circle of multiple choices where I can't make a decision.

“Yes. I would like a drink.”

That is all I say, and he looks at me with a fridge open in his office with an open question on his face. I still have no idea what I want.

“A soda?”

“Do you like coke?”

“That is fine.”

He grabs it off the side shelf of the door and hands it to me. The soda is cold, and I hadn't had any soda in a long time. I slowly open and drink it. I immediately feel my eyes blast open due to the caffeine.

My expression must have been amusing because Robert starts laughing a big belly laugh.

“It's not that funny.” I tell him feeling embarrassed.

“It is. Your face looked surprised.” he says between laughs slowly calming down.

“I am not surprised. I am just not used to the caffeine.” I said becoming exasperated.

“I didn't say you were. I said you looked. That there is the difference.” he said fully calm and taking a seat in his chair.

“What happened to edge lord-I mean that guy named Alexeev?” I asked carefully.

He starts laughing again and is bent on his desk.

“That there is a good description,” he said between laughter, “Many people called him many things, but that is new.”

“What is he called before?” I wanted to know. I wonder if it is any better than my nickname for him.

“Depends on the person. But he is overall not popular, I can tell you that much.”

“Well, that tells me nothing. I wanted to know something. I can’t do anything about that. I wanted to get back at him.

My explanation got little information or much of a response as he laughed even more.

“My gut will hurt after this. However, as true as it is that he brings the person to want to tease him a little bit. Although, like most people he can only take so much. Don’t go too far with it.”

“I will tease him for all his bossiness. He thinks he can boss everyone around.”

“Yeah, that is something he needs to figure out himself. He will learn when someone explodes at him about it.” he stated finally calming down. The atmosphere calmed down a lot.

He seems to know people well here. He doesn’t treat me the same as others. He, unlike the rest, keeps track of every person here. The staff, excluding him, don’t remember names that much. Our faces are a blur. They only remember us as necessary and treat us as brainless.

He is about to make a comment about something. But before he could, an alarm went off. The entire room is covered in red and is flashing and as soon as the thought of wonder of what is happening entered my brain, a video came on the screen of the two dudes who were discussing how I got out of my room during art therapy. They are yelling and holding chairs and threatening the guards.

The guards, of course, aren’t taking much of their threats and trying to meet the guys who were in the middle of the room. They are chanting about the conditions here and how much they wanted to be out. The guards respond that they won’t get out with that attitude. That they have a long way to go before they are approved by the director, who has an improvement sheet to follow.

Robert moves forward quickly. And is getting called by walkie talkie by multiple people in the facility. He quickly grabs it and turned to me:

“Stay here. It is the safest spot. If other guards come in, tell them that they need to move the others to their safe places as mandated in their directions. If they ask what you are doing here, tell them that I is asking you questions about the incident from a few days ago.”

He went out and is speed walking towards the E Hall, as it is called on the screen. I never realized that these halls have names. I guess it is to differentiate it from a random hall near the bathroom. The worst scenario is for someone to get severely injured by the guards or the people themselves or for someone to die and claim that they were fearful for their life and that they had changed overnight and that there is an investigation over the change of their behavior or even worse yet. They never have an investigation and are left without justice at all. The cockroach would win then. His silver badge constantly shining depending on the situation.

There is a full line of people. Guard by guard near each other like a pack of toothpicks in a box waiting to charge with their ends. They aren't checking the level of the threat there. They only care about the sharpness of the end. There is only one guard that is not armed and that is Robert. He took absolutely nothing. Not a stick, not any electronic device, not even a radio to call someone else. He just went with his person down to this hall. Where it is all falling apart at the seams.

“It struck her how eating was a comfort during a hard time because it reminded you that there had been other days, good days, when you'd eaten the same thing. Reminded you there were good days in life, when precious little else did. (268)”

-*Serena* by Ron Rash

The situation there just collects with more and more people. The screen shows that some are guards, but more of the people who are currently in the facility are getting added in the situation. They are collecting around the guys to help them. It looked like a massive crowd in the hall and they were wall to wall full of people. More and more guards appeared with more than just their sticks. Some of them even had tasers in their hands.

“Get back!” I hear many of them screaming as many people were pushing them back as the guards were trying to move forward.

“Move back, everyone. This is your last warning!”

This causes the situation to worsen and I never imagined the aftermath of it all. The tears and pain that will be caused and how that will be affected by all. People who fall in their grief and misery at what is being taken away.

Many parts of our human life were taken away here, but here more aspects that are just as precious if not more so than this. But here it is taken with a grave price that would be forever be etched on our minds and on the casts of the future.

“Better Treatment! Equality!”

Some of them were shouting things that didn’t make sense to anyone but themselves. One of which tried to catapult himself towards a guard, which did not work for him. I could catch glimpses of their feeling, but the combination of sound and the sight around me left me catching nothing at all. The words left my mind and ears and became a river. The river that no one could catch ahold of or understand. The river that only people who connect to the body could catch a glimpse. It is the river personified in my dreams and in my nightmares. My sweet dreamscape that ran past my senses and left me speechless for all that I could feel and all that could come.

“People are afraid of themselves, of their own reality; their feelings most of all. People talk about how great love is, but that’s bullshit. Love hurts. Feelings are disturbing. People are taught that pain is evil and dangerous. How can they deal with love if they’re afraid to feel? Pain is meant to wake us up. People try to hide their pain. But they’re wrong. Pain is something to carry, like a radio. You feel your strength in the experience of pain. It’s all in how you carry it. That’s what matters. Pain is a feeling. Your feelings are a part of you. Your own reality. If you feel ashamed of them, and hide them, you’re letting society destroy your reality. You should stand up for your right to feel your pain.”

-Jim Morrison

The situation in the hallway has been happening for over fifteen minutes now. With as many guards as there is, I could not tell if Robert had left or where he was in the crowd. I wonder if he ditched but my brain could no longer follow or make anything out of the output from outside. It is too much and too little information for me to focus on as everything bombarded my every bodily cell at once and I couldn’t take it anymore and the more I couldn’t take it, the louder the bugs started buzzing.

The bugs were constant before I got here. They started sometime after my last job. The only difference between my life now and then is that here it has gotten worse than ever. Here I constantly hear them and even see them. Other times I even feel them. This freaks people out the most. The fact that I feel the webs and crawling legs in my veins. They feel like they lived in my bloodstream, and to this day I am convinced that to some extent something foreign is in my bloodstream. Nothing can convince me otherwise. There is something foreign in my skin that continues to thrum against my life, and it is not necessarily my enemy nor is it my friend. It is a

constant presence that just is. It is nothing to land me anywhere for. It is something that they ask me about along with the fact about my friends. Which I don't understand.

My thoughts are soon broken free by a new voice that is calmer than everyone in the area. Marta, who acted like nothing is happening at all. She stood in the office staring at me with curiosity.

“What is going on in the hallway?”

“It is a uproar of people who are sick of this place.”

“What is new? The conditions of this place and their constant view of those who live here have been stagnant and slowly moving for over a hundred years.”

“That is not the point.”

“Then the point is?”

“For a new horizon and less bugs in my mind.”

“Bugs? We've talked about this Penny. There is nothing going on with that. There are all types of foreign things around us. What you are thinking about is bacteria.”

“It is not.”

“It is.”

Before I could argue further, I hear someone put something on a desk. And open a drawer. It is Jack digging through Robert's stuff.

“Hey. What are you doing?”

Marta flitters between him and her with her arms crossed. She is now annoyed with me that I focused my attention elsewhere, but I could see she is just as interested as I am in what he is doing digging around someone's stuff.

“None of your business. Just being useful in this turn of events”

He said this to us as he is taking out a swiss knife that seems to be primarily used to open cans or something. He puts it in his pocket and grabs a device that I have no name for. I have only seen them in movies when I was small. It looks like a remote that only had three buttons.

“You rush in and take someone’s shit and don’t say anything. We could help you know.”

He turns to me briefly while going towards the door, and said something that I am not sure of the truth to this day: “There is only you here. I don’t know what ‘we’ you are referring to.”

“What is he talking about? Marta has been here the whole time since I been here. She is a little younger than me, but she is here!”

He only shakes his head at me and states this: “You are the only one in here, there was never a Marta here.” and goes into the hallway to deal with whatever is happening out there.

I begin to look directly back at her. She looks insulted and acts as if someone spat at her.

“Who does he think he is? I exist here in front of you, Penny. You know he is just trying to get between us and our friendship.”

I can only stare at her. I didn’t want to believe that my stay here is a lie. My first roommate is clearly here in front of me. Why would he think she is a lie?

“You’re not really giving what he said any thought are you? He is probably here for a reason you know. Us though, we are here to get to the bottom of everything.”

I want to believe her, but no one really took account of her.

“Come on, Penny. Just ask the guards! They are always around us. They have taken me to my activities. To the art therapies and my appointments. I have always been by your side.”

I hear a yell that is outside of the voice of Marta's and I try to focus on the voice. To focus on that voice physically pained me. It is the most difficult thing I can do to focus on a specific sound.

The voice is Robert's. One of the guards is shown to stab him on screen. The screen is in full color and etched in various colors. Robert's amber eyes seemed to widen on the screen and he immediately decked the person away. This upset the people there more than anything. The amber eyes. The yellow badge. The now lost smile. It is all we had. They were going towards him and pushing so many guards forward. It is like a popped band of a catapult made by a kid in the old days. They immediately catapulted towards him like a gravity pull that they couldn't ignore. A direct order in the head that they couldn't avoid. The end is unavoidable. This could be seen in the end.

The end is catastrophic and something that I would forever see in my dreams floating with other parts of my mind. The people trampling over him some were trying to pick him up and others were trying to get out. More people got injured in their attempt to help him.

The rush of being free and finally giving back the treatment is to them worth the cost. Talking got us nothing. Nothing is treated with care. It is immediately thrown out and ignored with the shake of an ancient book of uncertainties. What do you do if the circle doesn't fit into the square? What if it is meant to be?

The screams from all the guards and patients were immense in my ears.

"Are you just going to stand there and watch the screen? Or are you going to actually help move him out?"

Edgar appeared in the hallway and passed by me and took a knife from another guard's desk.

“Move who out?”

There were so many people there now I had no clue who he is referring to out there.

“Who do you think? Rob out there! He is injured because of your exploring trips.”

He moved out towards the door so fast that I had to job to catch up.

When we finally got there, Robert is on the floor, and now against the wall. Jack is leaning on one knee and they were both away from the mass of people pressing against the guards who were now out of sight.

Edgar immediately started jogging towards Robert and presses his fingers against his neck eventually moving them away and placing his head against his chest. Then he pulls his head away from his chest and puts Robert down on the floor and starts to search for something on his person.

“What are you doing?”

Both Jack and I ask simultaneously.

“You both got one guess as to what I am trying to do. Either help or go help call the assistants. This is out of our hands now.”

Edgar explains this while quickly finding what he is looking for: a knife. He brings it to his shirt. I jump forward but I am held back by Jack.

“He knows what he is doing.”

Jack seems confident in his statement, and I watch Edgar tear the polo shirt with a knife that had rust on it. And this image stays forever on repeat in my mind, yet I cannot find regret for going to the next floor. It is needed for me. It is needed for them. It is needed for us all. In my mind the bugs buzz again, demanding some sort of sacrifice. Good or bad. It didn't matter to him. Just so long as it could make him laugh in some disgusting way.

What war has left its wake of whitened bone,
Soft stems of summer grass shall wave again,
And all the blood that war has ever strewn
Is but a passing stain.

-*War* by Leslie Coulson

The floor is dirtied not only by the dirt and whatever else spilt on the floor in the past week or so, but also of Robert's blood. Edgar turns Robert on his side and Jack's grip tightens. The grip is like steel against the catapult made by man. I want to do all that I could to go help, but his grip reminded me that I have something in my veins. I try to grasp it and it only becomes stronger and stronger with the grip getting tighter and tighter.

Robert became a further memory of the self that I could only see in a faded vision. He became more than one person, but multiple as Edgar is taking it apart and stealing parts of an old uniform to press on the robot. Or is he a robot?

I couldn't tell what Robert is. Is he still human? Is he always here? What if he is like Marta? She is staring at the passing of it all with the widest eyes I have ever seen. She kept looking at me with hurt and fear and tried to grab me by the arm and tell me to move. Consistently I heard her voice and I couldn't stand to ignore it. I is like ignoring the truth of the self. The truth of it all. The reality at my feet. The doctors say it is altered, but I know the truth of it all. It's not altered. It's a reality that they couldn't accept. That we were so much like them. That we were human. That we were a part of this world. Could I give her up now that the robot is down? The golden era is gone. The yellow lining that we wanted. It is not their silver, but it is ours. The ownership of the yellow. The ribbon that we wear with pride.

Not every man knows what he shall sing at the end,

Watching the pier as the ship sails away, or what it will seem like

When he's held by the sea's roar, motionless, there at the end,

Or what he shall hope for once it is clear that he'll never go back.

-The end by Mark Strand

The parts of Robert were picked up by Jack and Edgar on the outside. Many of us are lined into buses on the outside and are about to go to a new destination. I am grabbed by a guard and taken with Robert and the metallic parts to the hospital. The nurses are rapidly connecting him with things and trying to put him back together.

The metallic life of the ambulance seems to grow wider when we arrive to the hospital and he is sent to an operating room. I am told by Edgar to wait in the waiting area, while they go somewhere as I would just be in the way.

I sit for over an hour in the waiting room. I can't be certain of how much time had passed. While waiting I hear someone's heels clicking past me. She has short hair that is dyed a different color. It is blonde, but she had different layers of colors in the roots. She is at the counter and demanding to go to the room where her husband is in and she is told that the operation is not over yet. That she would be told when it is over. She huffs and looked more upset than when she walked in and sits near me.

"Hello." I try to offer conversation. I wanted anything to do at this point.

"Hi." she said rather shortly too, but I had to let it slide.

Her husband is in the hospital. I wondered how old her husband is, but that is none of my business. I try to figure out how to continue the conversation. I couldn't exactly ask how she is

doing, when I somewhat heard what she is here for from here, and it's a hospital. Nobody wants to be asked that here. Especially since the answer is normally bad because they are visiting someone.

She flips through a random magazine, while muttering about something below her breath about someone needing retirement or something. I just sit there awkwardly and started sweating in my seat and try to pay attention to anything else.

“Hey mom, is dad out yet?”

A girl with brown hair asked a question. She looks bad. Her hair is messed up and had random things shoved into a bag.

“No Sofia. He is still being operated on. Maybe after this he will see why he should retire or at least work anywhere else and not nearly kill himself doing things like this. “

She said this while violently flipping the pages in the magazine before finally tossing it aside.

“Don't get snappy with me. You have been upset with dad for doing this for years. At least he is doing something that he seems satisfied with. He loves helping others.”

She defends her father, but that seems to fall on deaf ears with her mother.

“He can help others somewhere else. Anywhere else. A place that doesn't try to kill him on a weekly basis.”

The one called Sofia sighed and sat near her mother. She taps on her phone and tries to play a game or contact someone. It is a distraction that I wished I had at this point. It is better than just sitting here and staring at the wall and the constant info-commercials on the TV in the room.

The commercials were always the same if you have these symptoms you have this. Please take these pills and it will make you well. That is not really the case but keep telling people that if you want. Some medication does not really work for some people. Other times it makes it worse. Other times it makes you feel like a shell. And another percentage it actually helps. It depends on the genes. Or at least that is something I remember Dr. Mores talking about to me when she tried to give me a condition. It is either that on the screen or it is about healthy eating.

The food on the screen is just a blur that I couldn't focus on. I can only think of the silver and yellow spots that I saw on the screen. And I just stared at nothing. It seemed like over an hour and soon enough I see that that family is walking back and forth on the first floor.

"When are they going to let us know what is happening? They should have operated on him by now!"

His wife is impatient and is becoming louder and louder in the room. The daughter just looks embarrassed and anxious about everything that is happening and every time she hears the door open, she immediately looks toward it and gets up. Just to be disappointed that what she is looking for isn't there. The yellow is gone now. It turned into gray for most. The smiles are not present.

"Mom, calm down. Jogging through the hospital is not going to make things go faster."

"Don't tell me that! Focus on whatever you were doing."

The mom seems more frazzled than before. Is her husband not usually in the hospital this long?

Finally, after what seemed like a slow eon that crept down to the pores. A nurse finally came and said something, but I couldn't hear them. It jolted me awake. I didn't remember when I

fell asleep. The family of that guy immediately run to the nurse and go past her. They were searching for the room that her husband is in.

We tell beginnings: for the flesh and the answer,
 or the look, the lake in the eye that knows,
 for the despair that flows down in widest rivers,
 cloud of home; and also the green tree of grace,
 all in the leaf, in the love that gives us ourselves.

The word of nourishment passes through the women,
 soldiers and orchards rooted in constellations,
 white towers, eyes of children:
 saying in time of war What shall we feed?
 I cannot say the end.

Nourish beginnings, let us nourish beginnings.
 Not all things are blest, but the
 seeds of all things are blest.
 The blessing is in the seed.

This moment, this seed, this wave of the sea, this look, this instant of love.
 Years over wars and an imagining of peace. Or the expiation journey
 toward peace which is many wishes flaming together,
 fierce pure life, the many-living home.
 Love that gives us ourselves, in the world known to all
 new techniques for the healing of the wound,
 and the unknown world. One life, or the faring stars.
 -Excerpt of Muriel Rukeyser's *Elegy in Joy*

The deal is done. It is over. We finally got the freedom at the cost. Whether Robert is dead or alive I have no idea. Whether he is real or not, I could not tell you.

In the end all the things that happened ended up on the news. Over ninety people got arrested for various reasons. I couldn't tell if they were the people I ever met before. One guy that is the head of some government position got fired for some policy he broke. Johnson and Dr. Mores were sent to trial, but not much came out of that. No one really thought too much of that trial. It is all one big whatever for them. But not for us. It is the race against the clock, a bright

amber-yellow light at the end of the tunnel. With an appearance that always shifts for the occasion.

Some of the notes that I found were never found again, but I was told by Jack that he wrote them for Robert and to annoy me in particular after I became nosier of what I is doing. I wanted to kill him for it.

I almost forgot to share, but I had to take a ride with Edgar to someplace else. To a new state where there is a mandated specialist for me. Who knew of what I felt of my own connected bodies of water, how my mind linked things? But how could they know? They weren't me. They weren't anything like me. But I went because it seemed like there is no way out of it.

There is no way out of this system, but at least it is something new. I hoped to find a new amber color in the distance. A place filled with brightness and beginnings that transcendentalists could only dream of. I wanted to make it my own and be able to share the gleam of the amber stream that contained fragments of the past and continue. A working fossil. A working part of my own history and story. Where it is only controlled by me. And those who understand the rivers that connect the tides.

The tides are golden and are in my reach. I hope for those who got sent elsewhere that the tide reaches them. Especially George, who became Stonehenge to the world of that facility. The Stonehenge may be understood yet in his constant bellows and cries to the world that is now letting him in bit by bit. Hopefully he too can own that world of his own. The excesses of the mind now reaches the sky

